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By Ralph
Milne Farley

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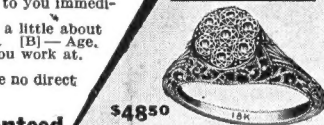
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ALL-STORY WEEKLY

VOLUME 203

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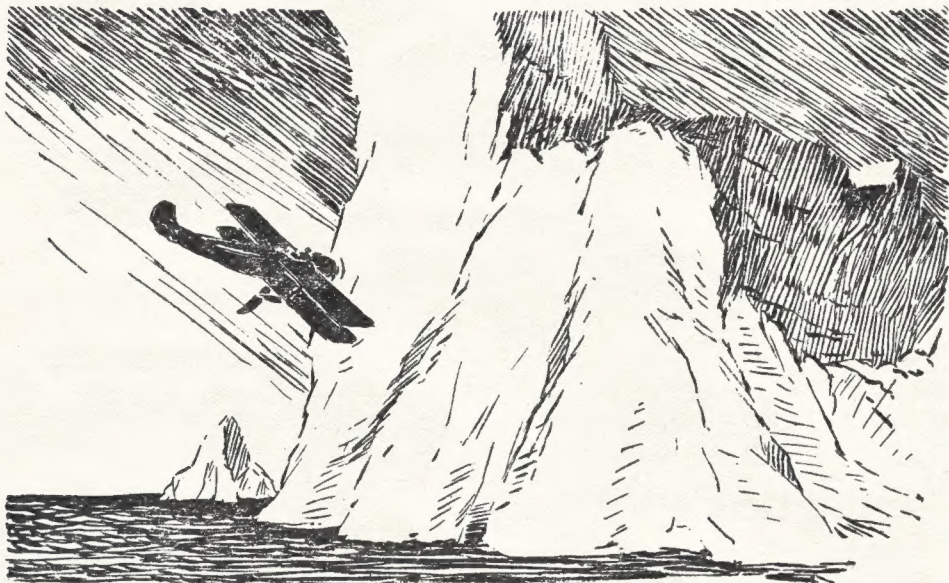
ARGOSY

ALL-STORY WEEKLY

VOLUME 203

SATURDAY, MAY 11, 1929

NUMBER 4



The course of the plane was carrying it straight toward a lofty pinnacle of ice

The Radio Flyers

Eric Redmond and his partner, Angus Selkirk, start on their flight for the Pole with high hopes—and no suspicion of the amazing adventures that await them

By RALPH MILNE FARLEY

Author of "The Radio Man," "The Radio Beasts," and "The Radio Planet"

FOREWORD

ONE reason why truth is stranger than fiction is that truth, and more particularly scientific truth, often consists of paradoxes so preposterous that no writer of fiction would have the effrontery to employ them.

For example, consider the black light of Major Wood, which was used in the invisible search lights of the World War, and which won him the distinction of being one of the five American physicists ever to be admitted to the Royal Society of England.

Consider Major Hoar's proof that to regard the earth as flat, introduces

less error into the calculations involved in the aiming of long-range guns than to regard the earth as curved; which discovery has greatly simplified the mathematics of gun-fire.

Consider Dr. Rogers's discovery that much static and interference can be eliminated and secrecy obtained, by burying underground the aërials on one's radio set, which device was extensively used for signalling in the World War.

Consider Eric Redmond's discovery that there is no North Pole!

All of the above listed discoveries except the last-named, are well enough known in scientific circles. Now, for the first time, Eric Redmond's story is to be given to the world.

CHAPTER I.

THE MYSTERIOUS MESSAGE.

THE author must apologize for intruding himself into the narrative, but this is necessary in order to explain how he comes to be able to report the exciting events that follow. If you are willing to accept the author's word as to the truth of the story, you may skip this chapter.

A few months ago, the serenity of my farm life was disturbed by my receiving the following communication:

TECHNICAL STAFF

U. S. ARMY
Washington, D. C.

Subject: Strange Radio Messages.
To Capt. Ralph M. Farley, C. A. Res.,
Chappaquiddick Island, Edgar-
town, Massachusetts.

1. This department has noted with interest the knowledge of radio displayed by you in three stories of yours in the ARGOSY-ALLSTORY WEEKLY, relating the adventures of Miles S. Cabot, formerly first lieutenant, Signal Corps, on the planet Venus. These stories, although published as fiction, yet bear the unmistakable stamp of the truth, and lead the department to hope that you have profited sufficiently from your as-

sociation with Lieut. Cabot, so that you will be able to assist the department in a problem which is now confronting it.

2. To be specific, our radio experiment station at Georgetown is in receipt of fragmentary and undecipherable messages which—absurd though it may sound—are clearly indicated by our direction finders to emanate from underground at a slightly northerly angle. A number of reserve officers are being called into active duty, to constitute a board to consider this problem, and your name has been suggested by the chief of coast artillery as the representative of his branch.

3. If satisfactory to you, will you please apply, by indorsement hereon, for active duty, beginning October 1, 1928, to continue at the pleasure of the President?

WATTS EATON HUGHES,
Colonel, O. D.

This letter came at a most opportune time. The fall harvesting was practically completed—we harvest late, off the Massachusetts coast. The pay, and the commutation of heat, light, quarters and—a new wrinkle since the war—rations for self and family, would enable me to take Mrs. Farley with me to Washington for a well-deserved outing. I could vote by mail on “the first ironing day after the first wash day in November,” if the detail kept me there that long.

But by far the greatest inducement was that the mysterious signals might prove to be another message from my old classmate, now on Venus, from whom the huge wireless station on my farm had received no word for over a year. Of course, it was inconceivable that the message could be from *underground*!

So I accepted Colonel Hughes's invitation, and in due course of events found myself in conference with some of the noted radio minds in America.

I was hopelessly outclassed. I wish that Myles Cabot himself had been there in my place. He would have shown them! It soon became evident that the messages were actually coming from underground, or at least from

that direction. All sorts of devices and expedients were tried to clarify the reception, so that we could make out connected sentences, instead of merely a word here and there; but to no avail. Finally, just as a matter of courtesy, it became my turn to make a suggestion.

Said I, merely for the sake of saying something that might sound a bit relevant: "If the messages really are coming from underground, why don't we try to catch them on the Rogers underground antennæ?"

THE reply of one of the learned gentlemen was characteristic: "What degrees do you hold, Mr. Farley?" spoken in the tone of voice that usually accompanies a Back Bay Boston lorgnette.

But fortunately, Colonel Hughes didn't hold a Ph.D. either, and so my idea was given a trial, and as a result we got the messages at last.

I claim no credit for the idea. It merely happened to work, that's all.

Well, at any rate, the messages were from a man named Eric Redmond, of whom none of us had ever heard. He claimed to be stranded somewhere on a polar airplane trip; but, as he didn't seem particularly anxious to be rescued, and as we could not find any record of any such person being among the missing, or even having set out to discover the pole, and as the opening part of his narrative was devoted to rather uninteresting preliminaries and details, the eminent scientists drifted back to their more lucrative professions, leaving Colonel Hughes and me and a hired stenographer to receive and record the dit-dahs from Eric Redmond.

It developed early in the course of our communications with Redmond, that Editor Giff of the *Daily Eagle* of Milwaukee had some sort of rights in Eric's story, through having fitted out his expedition; so, when the record was complete, I journeyed to Milwau-

kee, and interviewed Mr. Giff. From him I learned a number of facts to piece out the beginning of the story. He very magnanimously expressed the view that I was entitled to a part interest, through having been the recorder and transmitter of the narrative. Accordingly this manuscript will appear simultaneously in the ARGOSY-ALL-STORY WEEKLY and the Milwaukee *Eagle*. All rights reserved.

This explains how I am able to tell you about Eric Redmond's dash for the pole.

CHAPTER II.

THE START.

ERIC REDMOND was born on a Minnesota farm on April 6, 1896.

His mother was of Swedish and his father of Irish descent, a good combination. The United States of America celebrated his coming of age by declaring war on the Central Powers, and Eric promptly enlisted in the aviation section of the signal corps.

Although he did not get into any combat flights in the World War, he learned to fly, and became well acquainted with the mechanism of planes. Through the fact that aviation was then a part of the signal service of the army, instead of having a separate branch of its own as now, he also received considerable training in radio, or "wireless" as it was then called.

After the war, he did stunt-flying in circuses for awhile, but finally settled down to a steady job in the experimental laboratory of a large electrical company in southern Wisconsin.

In the fall of 1925, it became known that Commander Byrd, who had just returned from Etah, Greenland, was contemplating his second attempt at flying to the pole. Editor Giff of the Milwaukee *Daily Eagle*, in his habitually autocratic manner, sent for Eric Redmond and abruptly informed him that the *Eagle* had selected him to con-

duct a competitive north-polar expedition which the *Eagle* was secretly getting up.

Editor Giffit has such a self-assured, domineering and withal affable manner, that it never occurred to Eric to question whether he should accept the assignment, so he meekly inquired why he had been selected for the honor.

"Because," replied the editor, "you are the only man in this vicinity who combines the requisite aviation and radio knowledge. Furthermore, we have been watching you for some time, and are confident that you can keep your mouth shut. Still furthermore, you have no relatives to say good-by to, or to sue the paper under the workmen's compensation act if you should fail to return."

"And what are your plans for the personnel and material of the expedition?" asked Eric.

"A special plane is already almost completed at the Lawson airplane factory in South Milwaukee."

"But I thought that that factory had been abandoned," interjected Eric.

"It had," the editor replied. "That's why I picked it. If any regular plane-manufacturer had been making the thing, the true reason for its existence would have been sure to leak out. But the Lawson factory is in such an out-of-the-way location that renewed activity there is likely to pass unnoticed. And, even if noticed, it is likely to be regarded as a mere repetition of the old Lawson fiasco."

Eric Redmond registered a mental doubt as to the advisability of flying a plane built by an unknown maker, and with the Lawson jinx attached; but he said nothing. One doesn't talk back to Editor Giffit.

The editor continued: "This plane will be equipped with wheels, skis and pontoons; for plain, fancy and assorted landings in the Arctic. A seven-cylinder Berner motor."

Eric had heard of Berner, and this mention reassured him somewhat.

"And who are to be my companions?" he asked.

But one doesn't interrupt the editor of the Milwaukee *Eagle* either. So the description of the plane went on: "It will have an unusually large capacity for gasoline, and very little else. The scientific apparatus and blankets will be of the lightest possible materials. The food will be dehydrated and concentrated. Everything, except the radio, will yield to the necessities of the gasoline supply."

"RADIO?" asked Eric hopefully.

"Yes, radio," replied Giffit. "the most modern receiving and sending set, especially the sending. Power supplied by the motor of the plane. Also an emergency foot-power dynamo. The idea will be for you to send the news, by code, to WHAD, as soon as you land at the pole. Until then, mum's the word."

"Land at the pole!" gasped Eric. "But Byrd is planning merely to fly over it."

"All the more reason for you to land," was the reply. "Then, even if Byrd gets ahead of you, the *Eagle* expedition will be the first to set foot on the North Pole."

"But you forget Peary," objected the young man.

"I forget nothing," testily said the editor. "Why not say that I forget Cook? Listen here. The stories of the two men are so parallel as to be truly remarkable. Each of them, after slowly struggling northward a few miles a day, suddenly made a dash to the pole with no white companions to check their observations or to contradict them, and in this dash covered perfectly absurd distances each day. I don't happen to remember Cook's exact figures from the time he left land and turned northward, until he returned to his base, but the speed was so fabulous that a howl of protest went up from all the arctic experts of the world. Peary's even more preposter-

ous speed*—for some reason, perhaps because he was in good standing with the amalgamated union of polar explorers—attracted no particular attention. Yet there are the figures in Peary's own book. In his five-day dash to the pole, he made twenty-nine miles the first day, twenty-three the second, twenty-three the third, twenty-nine the fourth, and forty-six—think of it!—the fifth. On the return trip he covered the first one hundred and fifty-three miles in two days, and a few hours. Fancy yourself trying to make seventy miles, or even forty-six miles, a day, hiking along an even road in a temperate climate, with an inviting inn with supper and a warm bed awaiting you at the end; and then imagine Peary doing it over the rough ice, through the polar cold, with camps to make, and meals to cook, and observations to take, and his dogs to care for!"

"Ah, there you've mentioned the clew," said Eric, "the dogs. They pulled him along."

"So you may think," countered Giff, picking up a clipping from his desk, "but listen to this. Peary himself disclaims this interpretation. When the reporters interviewed him in Labrador on his return, one of them asked him if he rode. 'Ride!' he exclaimed. 'Sir, in Arctic expeditions a man is lucky if he is able to walk without pushing his sledge. Usually he may grip the rear and thrust it ahead. It is like guiding a breaking plow drawn by oxen. You must also expect at any moment that the sledge may strike some pressure-ridge that will wrench you off your feet.' Fancy *plowing* seventy-six miles a day over Arctic ice, all bundled up like an Eskimo! It is absurd!"

"Whew!" ejaculated Eric Redmond.

"And so," continued the editor, "as the pole has never yet been discovered or even approached, we wish you, as the representative of the *Daily Eagle* to be the first man to stand upon it."

THE idea quite thrilled the young aviator.

Next the terms of his employment were agreed upon—or it would be more correct to say, were stated by Mr. Giff. Eric was to receive two hundred dollars a month, as a sort of retainer, until his departure from Milwaukee. All expenses of the trip were to be paid by the paper. If and when he returned, he was to receive two hundred dollars a month for the time he was away. And, if he could prove that in the meantime he had set foot on the pole, he was to receive a bonus of ten thousand dollars for the exclusive story. The lecture rights were to be his own, and undoubtedly he would be able to land a good position with some airplane or radio concern.

The prospects were decidedly alluring.

But he accepted, not so much for this reason, but because one always accepts propositions presented by Editor Giff of the Milwaukee *Daily Eagle*.

His sole companion on the trip was to be Angus Selkirk, a red-headed dour Scotsman of the *Eagle* staff, with a considerable flair for mechanics and radio. Angus, too, had been a World War flyer, of observation planes in the coast artillery.

"They do everything the others do—and then some. The big guns corps," quoted he.

The winter of 1925-26 seemed interminable to the two flyers, although it was crammed full of the work of preparation. Yet, engrossing though this

*The author must apologize for including these sentiments about Admiral Peary, who was an intrepid gentleman and certainly contributed greatly to our knowledge of the frozen north, even though—or rather if—he did not reach the pole. *De mortuis nil nisi bonum*. Furthermore, as will appear as this narrative progresses, Eric Redmond has completely vindicated Peary's veracity. But the present chapter would not be complete without recording Editor Giff's utterances.—R. M. F.

was, it did not assuage their growing anxiety to be off and away.

The two young men read, from cover to cover, every book on polar exploration in the Milwaukee public library. Also the complete newspaper files—from the "morgue" of the *Daily Eagle*—on the Byrd expedition of the summer before. It is remarkable how much knowledge one can gain from books.

By the end of the winter, the two felt like seasoned explorers, and were confident that their reading, plus a few days in Greenland, would be the equivalent of years spent in the Arctic. And if this is not so, if through study, followed by just enough experience to orient one's self and give a point of contact between book-learning and actual facts—if this is not the equivalent of experience, then what is the use of books!

As Selkirk remarked in this connection: "The fool learns by hard knocks, the wise man by the experience of others."

With that uncanny ability, possessed by newspaper men, to keep in touch with the news, whenever they really want to, the staff of the *Eagle* knew every move of the preparation for the Byrd expedition, and many a leaf was taken from Byrd's plans and added to their own.

This sometimes filled Eric with qualms of conscience; it seemed underhanded to be thus secretly planning to cheat Byrd of his well-deserved victory, and especially unfair to be copying many of his scientific instruments and other ideas. This was enhanced by the square way in which Byrd and MacMillan had coöperated by consolidating their two competing expeditions in 1925; but all such qualms of conscience were swept away, when it became known that Amundsen was about to attempt to cross the pole from Spitzbergen, in a dirigible.

No longer were Redmond and Selkirk racing to beat Byrd, but rather to

beat Amundsen. No longer did they regard themselves as competitors of Byrd, but rather as secret allies of his, striving that America might fly to the pole ahead of Norway.

Among the ideas which they copied from Byrd were his inflatable rubber-boat and his sun-compass.

BUT Redmond devised an improved drift-meter. Mathematicians will assure you that when one is drifting in a current, whether of water or of air, it is impossible to ascertain the direction and speed of the drift except by reference to fixed objects, such as the shore or the ground. So that was the principle on which all past aviation drift-meters had been built. But such instruments are obviously useless in a fog.

The mathematicians overlook one point, namely that the starting of a plane from rest furnishes a reference datum, from which drift can be determined, if careful record is kept of speed ahead and of the fluctuations of wind pressure on the sides of the plane. This is the principle on which Eric Redmond's drift-indicator was built.

The *Eagle* staff also kept track of the rejected applicants for the Byrd trip. Many of the best of these were secured. Although no mention was made to any of them of the flying nature of the *Eagle's* expedition, which was pictured merely as a polar cruise after big game, yet their disappointment over being turned down by Byrd made it easy to secure their services for anything polar. This is on much the same principle that a rejected suitor is always an easy victim for any girl who wishes to catch him on the rebound.

In the early spring of 1926 the plane was completed and tested. The plane itself attracted but little attention at the Cudahy flying field. Eric Redmond was, of course, well known there; Angus Selkirk posed as a rich young man and owner of the plane, who had hired Eric as his aërial chauffeur. The

radio equipment was tested elsewhere in utmost secrecy.

They had planned to start in May, so as to reach Baffin Bay at the earliest date that the waters might be expected to begin breaking up. Etah was to be the hop-off.

This would not cause any clash with Byrd, who had used Etah the year before, for Byrd was now planning to fly from Spitzbergen.

But then there occurred an unexpected announcement, which changed all their plans. Both Amundsen and Byrd planned to fly in April, and the ice would not permit Etah to be reached before the end of July at the earliest. Thus both of their competitors in the race would have had time to cross the finish-line before Redmond and Selkirk had even got started.

Editor Giffit was downcast. All that he could suggest was that they wait to see if the other two flights failed, and if either succeeded, then give up the trip.

But at this juncture, the copious reading of the two young men stood them in good stead. Selkirk pointed out that the Byrd flyers of 1925, although equipped with three planes, as against only one which Byrd was taking to Spitzbergen, had spent a full month at Etah, had wrecked two of the planes, and had finally returned without even starting for the pole. So that there was still a sporting chance of overcoming a two-months' headstart.

But the real suggestion came from Redmond. Said he: "The central part of Greenland is covered with smooth and level snow, suitable for a landing field. This is the unanimous report of Nordenskiöld, Nansen, Peary and Byrd. The southern harbors of Greenland will be free of ice at least as early as Spitzbergen. Let's start at once, land the boat as far north as possible, establish a camp by plane on the northern interior of the Greenland ice-cap, and thus be able to take-off for the pole from a point even farther north than Etah, and at a much earlier date."

This idea was hailed as a godsend.

Accordingly plans were made for an immediate departure. The plane and its equipment were knocked down, boxed, and shipped.

Then Redmond and Selkirk took train for Halifax. Editor Giffit saw them off at the station and gave them his parting injunctions, namely:

"My boys, I am depending on one of you to be the first to set foot on the pole. I am depending on you to set foot there before Amundsen or Byrd even passes over. Remember, not one word by radio until you reach your objective. Then full particulars by code, and as quickly as possible. Good-by, good luck, and God bless you."

As the two young men took their seats in the observation car, and the train pulled out, Angus Selkirk heaved a sigh and remarked. "Well, thank the Lord, I'm shut of the chief for awhile at least. Now I can call my soul my own for the first time in five years."

"Only think!" ejaculated Eric. "We may actually be the first men ever to stand at the apex of the earth!"

"Sh!" interrupted Angus. "People may hear us. Besides," he added, "as Pittacus the Roman once wisely said: 'Never talk of your plans, until they have been carried out.'"

CHAPTER III.

OFF FOR BAFFIN BAY.

"HOORAY, hooray, we're off for Baffin Bay," shouted Eric as they stood on the wharf at Halifax, and watched their belongings being loaded into the little ice-breaker tied to the wharf.

"Sh!" admonished Angus. "People may hear us."

The plane and its equipment had been loaded onto the boat at Boston, which had then proceeded up the coast to meet the two at Halifax. This was due to an idea of Editor Giffit's that

it would attract less attention for the material and the personnel of the expedition to embark at different ports. Imagine an editor trying to prevent attracting attention! But there was a scoop at stake.

The crew contained a number of World War aviators and mechanics—mostly the latter—who had barely failed of acceptance for the Byrd expedition. All were ex-army men. There were no gobs or leathernecks, for Giff had had an idea that among doughboys he could develop more rivalry of Byrd. Army flyers have always resented the suggestion, current in some quarters, that "the naval aviators won the war."

There were two doctors along. The rest of the crew consisted mostly of young college boys who had served with Dr. Grenfell in Labrador.

Redmond and Selkirk were introduced as sporting gentlemen who were financing the trip. Nothing was said about the boxed and crated airplane parts stowed in the hold. They had been brought aboard ahead of the crew's arrival.

As the boat bore some uninteresting double feminine name, it was decided to rechristen it the "Coolidge," which wouldn't at all have pleased the editor of the only large Democratic newspaper in Wisconsin. But, as Angus Selkirk remarked, they were now out of Editor Giff's control, and so could afford to honor the man who was president.

On April 5, 1926, the Coolidge set out from Halifax; and, although considerable floe ice was encountered, reached Disco Bay, Greenland, twenty days later. The harbor of Kristianshaab, the principal local Danish settlement, was found still choked with ice, so the ship skirted the coast to the northward, finally coming to a curve in the shore where eddy-currents had cleared the water right up to the beach. And just beyond the beach was an Eskimo village. That it was inhabited

was indicated by the presence of *tupiks*—summer tents of skin—among the stone igloos.

So, to allay suspicion as to the object of the trip, Redmond announced: "This seems to be the spot where we were to land the freight."

The incongruity of landing several tons of boxed and crated freight on a barren beach by an Eskimo village, did not seem to dawn on any of the members of the party.

As the ship neared the village, quite a swarm of *kayaks* put out to meet her, and soon she was surrounded by these peculiar one-man canoes.

The only members of the crew who had had previous Arctic experience—unless one dignifies summer junkets with Dr. Grenfell by that name—were the captain and one of the mates, and they had been chosen not only on this score, but also because of their familiarity with the Eskimo vernacular.

They now engaged the natives in conversation, and explained that the expedition wished to land and hunt for game, which they would share with the natives. This explanation met with instant assent. Accordingly the Coolidge put in as close to the beach as possible and started unloading freight.

THE method by which the unloading was accomplished is but one example of the foresight with which the expedition had been planned. Six of the seven large whaling dories, with which the Coolidge was equipped, had been arranged with a series of vertical pegs along their gunwales, and these pegs fitted into corresponding holes in some heavy planks; so that, when the whole was pegged together, it would constitute a large and buoyant flatboat or raft.

Onto this raft the crates were lowered one by one by large davits on the side of the ship, and then the whole was pulled to the shore by means of a gasoline winch mounted on the beach. Planks were then laid from the raft

to the beach, and the crates were slid down these planks on gumwood rollers.

All this had been provided with a clear realization that Eskimo villages do not possess steamboat piers.

Despite all this careful preparation, they had not fully taken into consideration the vagaries of Arctic weather. Ever since the arrival of the Coolidge, the wind had been from the south. Suddenly it veered to the north, and the clear lane of water, which had led the party to choose this particular landing place, began to fill with ice cakes drifting back from up the sound.

The main crate, containing the fuselage, engine and all, was on the raft at the time. Angus was with it. The mate was at the winch, directing operations. Eric was in the seventh whale boat with four oarsmen, manipulating a tagline to keep the raft from swinging.

As the big chunks of ice began to drift down from the north, all hands instantly realized the situation. Angus waved frantically to the shore to speed up the engine; but a gasoline winch, with a given load to pull, can run just so fast and no faster, and thus the snail-like progress toward the shore continued.

Meanwhile the ice drifted in, thicker and thicker. The dory with the tagline no longer had full freedom of motion, and finally became a mere drag on the raft, until Eric, at a signal from Angus, cut loose. The crew of the dory then navigated slowly northward through the cakes, so as to maintain just about a constant position, awaiting further developments.

The ice proved faster than the raft, and was banked in a solid floe along the shore, by the time that the raft with its precious cargo reached the edge of the floe. The men on the shore, and their Eskimo allies, swarmed out across the ice to lay the planks.

But the mate spoke to one of the natives, and then sung out across the turmoil: "Hold on! Chief—says—

wind — change — ice — move — crate—go—bottom!"

"Good Lord!" thought Angus, "this is the most hopelessly irreplaceable package in the whole cargo. We have only one plane. If anything happens to that, the whole expedition is off!"

He hurried across the ice-floe to the shore to confer with the mate.

Meanwhile Eric in the dory, finding the ice pretty thick between him and the shore, started back toward the ship.

Said the mate to Angus: "The chief also says that we can't leave the raft here, or it will be crushed. It must be towed out to open water."

"Fat chance," replied the Scot; "can you imagine one dory towing this huge hulk out through all this drift?"

"Well," remarked the mate pessimistically, "it's heads I win, tails you lose. The ice will get you where you are, and will drop you through if you start to unload. And even if you get the big crate ashore, how are you going to move the rest of the freight, if the ice smashes your float?"

That was true. The raft was just as important as its load.

To add to their discomfort, snow started to fall.

Suddenly Selkirk was struck with an idea.

"I have it!" he shouted. "If we can get a loop of the winch cable out to the ship, we can hook it through a snatch-block there, and then you can pull the ferry back to the ship away from you."

"Fine!" shouted the mate. "Go to it!"

ORDERS were hurriedly given. The winch unwound a bit, to permit a bight in the rope to be carried out to the raft. The tag line was brought in and anchored up the beach to the north, to hold the raft against the drifting ice. Another mooring line was run out across the floe from the south. The raft was now securely moored.

Just then Angus noted the departure of Eric Redmond, battling the ice far out through the falling snow. Without Eric's dory, they could never get the winch rope to the Coolidge.

Angus shouted. The crunching and grinding of the ice cakes drowned out the sound of his voice. Eric's crew continued to row away. Oh, if only the wireless had already been brought ashore and set up!

Seizing one of the pinch-bars, which lay on the raft for the purpose of prying the boxes along on the rollers, Angus swung it around his head, hoping to attract Eric's attention.

Luck! The dory stopped rowing. One of the oarsmen waved his oar in reply. Angus did some quick thinking. Then raising his right arm aloft, he moved his hand round and round in a quick circle. Eric turned and saw the signal, and interpreted it correctly. It was the "assembly" of the United States Army. It meant "come here"; and Eric instantly turned his boat about.

But now, as the little craft battled the ice on its shoreward course, a huge white form loomed up to the north through the falling flakes. It was the first real iceberg that they had seen amid the floating chunks of drift-ice. Only a small iceberg, it was true, but large enough to crush the raft completely. And it was headed straight for the raft.

The conventional thing to do is to hurry out to meet such a menace, and dynamite it into small and harmless pieces just before it accomplishes its work of destruction. But, not anticipating the change in wind, and its effects, they had left all their dynamite aboard the Coolidge; and their only means of rushing the dynamite out to the berg, even if they had had it handy, was the dory, which was having troubles of its own.

And now the huge pinnacle of ice was almost upon the raft. Angus and his companions fled across their planks to

the shore. Eric and his crew sat with lifted oars, and awaited the debacle. What could possibly save them? The striking of the iceberg would put an end to their journey to the North Pole. By the time they could return to the States for another engine, Byrd and Amundsen would have flown, and summer would be at an end.

Eric and Angus had each begun to speculate on the chances of some similar disaster occurring to *both* Amundsen and Byrd—not that they wished their competitors any ill luck—and thus giving the *Eagle* expedition another chance in 1927. The other men, although they knew nothing of the contents of the huge packing cases, yet somehow sensed the importance of the impending tragedy. Even the Eskimos were tense.

It seemed that only a miracle could save them. And miracles don't happen in real life. So no miracle occurred. Instead, the most natural thing in the world happened.

Ice, being frozen water, is so very nearly the same weight as unfrozen water; about seven-eighths of an iceberg lies under the surface. This particular iceberg grounded on the bottom of the bay, just before it reached the raft.

It stopped, shuddered, and then bumped along off to the southward, paralleling the shore. The expedition's airplane was saved.

WITH a cheer, Eric's crew dipped their oars and sped shoreward, dodging the floating cakes with renewed vigor. Angus and his men rushed back to their posts. The dory touched the edge of the ice, which had by this time packed outside the raft. Planks were laid, and a bight of cable was quickly passed to those in the boat.

Then the battle through the snow-storm and floating ice toward the Coolidge began.

But the Coolidge itself was this instant in danger of grounding on a bar.

The captain, seeing the dory when it had turned toward the shore, had decided to get up steam and make for deeper water.

So just as Eric started out with the bight of precious cable, he noted with horror that the Coolidge, his goal, was departing.

One of the rowers had been a signalman in the army. Jumping to his feet, he wigwagged frantically with his oar. But the signal was not seen aboard the ship. Some one on shore, sensing the situation, lit a lantern and waved it. But that wasn't seen either, so thickly fell the snowflakes.

And then providentially the snow-storm lifted. The sun shone through a rift in the clouds. The signal was seen.

Among the crew on the Coolidge, there were ex-army men who could read wigwagging. And anyhow the wigwag and the radio code are the same. A wave to the right for a dit. A wave to the left for a dah. Forward for the end of a word.

A brief interchange of signals ensued, and the Coolidge swung around and put back again.

But at that they still had only a fighting chance to save the plane.

The chief danger now, was that some large piece of ice would get between the rowboat and the shore, and carry away the two reaches of line.

One such iceberg now loomed ahead of the dory, which by this time had nearly reached the ship. The whole crew were leaning over the side of the rail, cheering them on.

Eric ordered his men to cease rowing, so that the berg could pass between him and the ship. But they had misjudged the distance and direction of travel of the small mountain of ice, and accordingly orders were hurriedly given to back water. But a lesser mass of ice barred their way. *Crash!* The boat was caught and crushed between the two masses.

The five men jumped aboard the ice-

berg just in time. Some narrowly escaped falling into the water; but, by helping one another, all casualties were averted.

"Saved by a hair from the tail of the dog that bit us," remarked Eric. Grimly he quoted:

"The ice was here, the ice was there,
The ice was all around:
It cracked and growled, and roared and
howled,
Like noises in a swound!"

HE had had presence of mind enough to snatch the bight of the precious cable from the wreckage, after gaining the ice, and two of the rowers had saved their oars. All else was lost. But it wouldn't do to lose time into the bargain.

Grabbing one of the oars, Redmond crawled around the shore side of the berg and leaped onto a cake between it and the ship. The man with the other oar followed. The three on the berg tugged at the two reaches of cable to give Eric plenty of slack.

And so, hopping from cake to cake, Eric made for the ship. He alone, of those with him, realized just what was at stake.

At last nothing but open water confronted him.

"Here goes!" he cried, and plunged in. The other man dropped his oar and paid out cable. Some one on the Coolidge hove a line. Redmond caught it. And soon he was on board, frozen, dripping, but happy.

The bight was quickly passed around a snatch-block, which had been set up and securely braced during the dory's struggle to reach the ship. A signal was now given to the winchmen, and just in time, for the snow set in again and soon blotted out the shore.

The rope rattled through the block. Eric watched it, fascinated. It seemed to his exhausted and rather dazed mind to be rattling through much too fast.

The captain touched him on the shoulder.

"You'd better go below and change your wet clothes," he said.

Eric came out of his trance. He gave another glance at the rope, and turned to follow the captain below.

But the rope still fascinated him. He looked back once more.

He had been right! A loose end was whipping across the water. The fastening to the raft had broken. In a moment more the loose end would be pulled through the pulley, and would be traveling back toward shore again. Their last chance of saving the plane would be gone! And meanwhile, they had forgotten all about the four men on the ice.

CHAPTER IV.

BIG GAME.

THE rope continued to run through the pulley. The loose end rapidly neared the ship. It *must* be stopped before it reached the pulley, passed through, and became lost. For even if there had been another boat aboard the Coolidge, which there was not, they could never hope to row ashore, and bring back the cable again in this storm. And by morning the raft would probably be smashed, and the polar plane which it carried would be at the bottom of the bay.

Eric seized a marlinspike and jammed its point against the revolving wheel of the pulley. This slowed the progress of the rope, but the pull of the gasoline winch on shore was too strong to be resisted by any mere marlinspike.

The end of the rope whipped up to the block and—

Stuck! For the end carried the rope-socket which had been hitched to the raft, and this rope-socket was too large to pass through the block.

The block strained at its lashings, under the tremendous pull of the winch on shore. It seemed as though it must give way.

And then the rope slackened. Evi-

dently those on shore had noticed that the rope had parted from the raft, and accordingly had stopped the engine just in time.

But were things much better off, even so?

"We can never get that free end hitched to the raft again to-night," remarked the captain.

"No," replied Eric, "but we can hitch it to one of your windlasses."

"And pull the winch out by its roots and across the ice?" added the captain sarcastically. "A lot of good that will do."

One of the crew cut in with: "More likely pull us in shore and ground us."

"We've got to take a chance," interposed Eric, "that those on shore will catch on."

So the loose end was given a couple of turns around a windlass, and the windlass started. The rope tautened, and the vessel began to drag slowly in shore.

An extra anchor was thrown out on the offshore side, and the pulling resumed. Through the storm and the gathering dusk, they could not see the results. They could judge only by the way in which the windlass and the rope were acting.

Finally something seemed to give on the other end.

"There goes the winch, up by the roots," shouted one of the crew.

But the situation was too serious for any one to join in his levity, and he quickly subsided.

In came the rope, steadily, gradually. What was at the other end?

At length they could see through the gathering gloom. It was the raft, with the crate and Angus and his men still on board.

When the crate had been lifted from the raft and lowered into the hold, and the raft had been securely lashed alongside, Angus asked Eric as they went below: "Where are your men?"

Eric's face went blank with horror. "My God!" he ejaculated. "The

last I saw of them, three were on an iceberg and the fourth was on an ice cake. Our dory got smashed."

They hurriedly sought the captain, but he was adamant.

"It is absolute suicide to search for any one to-night."

So that was that.

With much self-recrimination, Eric turned in. Angus sought to comfort him.

Said the Scot: "They wanted adventure in the frozen north. Well, they have found it. So you should be satisfied."

But Eric was not satisfied. Selkirk changed the subject.

"Seems to me it's a lot warmer out, since the wind turned to the north."

"Does seem so," replied the other, "but I guess it's just because we have been so excited and working so hard. Glad we saved the plane and the raft."

Then a new worry smote him and he added: "But how can we ever get the rope to shore again, without any spare dory to carry it in?"

Meanwhile, in the chief's smelly skin tent on shore, the mate was asking: "Is it really warmer, or just that we have been working so hard?"

To which the Eskimo replied: "Always hotter when wind from north."

"How so?"

"Wind come from happy land beyond the ice," was the reply of the superstitious native. "Always sun there and lots of game. Innuit* came from there many, many years ago."

DAWN came at last. The weather was clear and cold, the wind being from the south again.

But during the night one of the six dories which formed the raft, had been stove in by the floating ice. This, however, suggested a solution of their difficulties. The raft was rebuilt with only four boats, and the fifth was used, in place of the dory wrecked the after-

noon before, to take the cable end ashore, and then act as pilot on the tag-line.

The freight was all landed successfully while the weather held good. And then immediately the Coolidge steamed away to the northward in search of the missing men.

"Although they started drifting south," said the captain, "the wind and tide were running to the north most of the night; so, if they are anywhere, they are north of here by now."

Redmond, Selkirk, the mate, one doctor, two mechanics, and two of the Grenfell college boys had sent their things ashore with the freight, ostensibly to hunt. On the trip up, although there had been plenty of work to keep all hands busy, there had also been plenty of opportunity, at mess and before turning in at night, for the two leaders of the expedition to get thoroughly acquainted with the crew, and by a judicious swapping of experiences to pick the cream of the party for this highly important shore duty.

In addition to food, supplies, and the plane and its equipment, one white-painted dory was left with them. It was arranged that the Coolidge was to exhaust all possible means to locate the missing men, and then was to hunt game as far to the northward as possible.

The captain was secretly instructed that, in case of trouble or the need for any mechanical assistance, he would be called back by wireless; but that, in event no such call was received within a month, he was to put in at Kristianshaab, and there await their return from the pole. If they did not return within a month, they were to be given up, and the expedition was to go back to the States. The mate and the rest of Eric's party were to go overland to Kristianshaab, after Eric's and Angus's departure, and await the Coolidge there.

* The Eskimo name for their own race.

The secrecy at this stage of the game may seem very strange. What possible harm could it do for every one on board to know now all about the object of the expedition? The answer is that editors are sensitive of ridicule; and that, if the venture should fail, if the plane and its two occupants should be swallowed up by the frozen north, never to return, Mr. Gifft didn't want the staffs of rival sheets to be poking fun at him.

But, you may ask, what was the use of carefully picking ex-doughboy flyers for the crew of the Coolidge, in order to develop a spirit of competition with the navy, if these men were never to be let in on the secret that any competition existed? Editor Gifft has never explained this to my complete satisfaction. His idea was that if it became necessary to let them in on the secret, then they would have the necessary esprit de corps. But why should I worry about his little inconsistencies, anyway? Editor Gifft was never very much noted for being consistent.

As the Coolidge steamed away, the mate explained to the Eskimos that the party had gone north to hunt.

The old chief's eyes twinkled.

"Perhaps they get *arcla*," he said.

"And what is an *arcla*?" asked the mate.

"The *arcla* is a big gray beast, almost as large as a polar bear. It lives in the north, way *beyond* the ice. Sometimes one comes down over the ice, and then we kill it. Its front feet have three long toes, but its hind feet are like those of a man. It often sits down on its haunches like a man."

"Oh, yeah?" snickered the mate incredulously. "I hope the boys get one."

THE conversation was broken off by Eric putting all hands to work uncrating and assembling the plane. Now the nature, although not the purpose, of their freight could be made known.

"Boys," said Eric, "we've got an airplane here, and I reckon we may get a chance at some wider cruising and shooting than the crowd on the ship. That's why I brought you aviators along."

In four days the craft was assembled on the beach, and a runway built of the crating down to the edge of the water, as the beach was not level enough nor smooth enough for a take-off. Meanwhile the radio had been set up, and the evenings were beguiled by programs from the more powerful of the American stations. The occasional tuning-in of WHAD, which was made possible by the great power of their receiving set, gave pangs of homesickness to two of the party. Milwaukee seemed very, very far away. The Eskimos would not believe the mate's explanation as to the human source of all the music, but marveling, they accepted the words as being the voices of spirits of the air.

On May 1, when the plane was ready for launching, a warm north wind drove in the drift-ice and spoiled their plans. All commented on the warmth of the wind, and the mate recounted the native legend of the land of perpetual sunshine beyond the polar ice.

Angus Selkirk was particularly interested.

"How like the Greek accounts of the happy Hyperboreans, the dwellers beyond Boreas, the god of the cold winds!" he remarked. "And then some race, I forget which, speaks of the Ultima Thule, or land beyond Thule, the frozen north. I believe that the Irish and Norse sagas contain tales of journeys to such a land. Leif the Lucky, son of Eric the Red, thought that he had reached it, when he discovered America."

This monologue was interrupted by one of the Eskimos pointing out to sea and shouting: "*Awik soah! Awik tediksoah!*" — "Many walruses! A great many walruses!"

Here was a chance at game! Food

for the party. Repayment to the natives for their hospitality, and a justification for the supposed object of the expedition.

On one of the floating ice cakes in the distance, some black dots were described. The whale boat was hastily launched. Being white, it would pass for an ice cake in the eyes of the huge beasts. The oar-locks were muffled. Eric, Angus and five of the six, armed with rifles, and two Eskimos with spears, occupied the boat. Several more natives followed in *kayaks*. Even the mate essayed a *kayak*. The native harpoons had floats attached, made of inflated whole sealskins.

Buffeting their way amid the floating ice, which was not quite so thick as on the day of the first landing, they reached the cake of the walrus without disturbing them. Four huge beasts, all asleep.

AT a signal from Eric, his four boys and the doctor opened fire on two of the walrus, and the Eskimos followed with their harpoons. The four creatures, abruptly awakened from their nap, plumped off the ice into the water. The harpoon-ropes whistled over the gunwales; and one rope, catching the foot of one of the college boys, pulled him over the edge and into the depths.

Above the din, the voice of Angus Selkirk could be heard, saying: "He wanted adventure, and he is getting it."

The sealskin floats were thrown over. Then as the four walrus disturbed the rest of their herd, peacefully grazing on the bottom, black heads began bobbing up to the surface all around the boat, to see what all the excitement was about. Up they came, puffing and blowing, and spitting out seashells. And among the black heads was the boy who had fallen overboard. Hastily his comrades pulled him in again.

The walrus kept a reasonable distance away from the boat, and prob-

ably their curiosity would soon have been satisfied and they would have returned to their bed of shell-fish, had not one of the boys taken a pot shot at one of the old bulls.

The tusker, wounded and infuriated, but not in the least disabled, promptly charged the boat, barking his battle-cry, "*Ook! Ook! Ook!*" as he came.

The mate from his *kayak*, excitedly shouted advice: "Keep him away, keep him away! And if he gets his teeth hooked over the gunwale, for God's sake don't shoot him, or he'll sink to the bottom, and swamp the boat!"

"What do you want us to do," yelled back Angus sarcastically, "pick him up gently by the tusks and drop him over the side?"

Eric fired one shot.

Then the beast was upon them, and put an end to further persistence. He tried to do just what the seaman had said he would, namely, hook his tusks over the edge of the boat, but whether for the purpose of climbing aboard or of wrecking the craft, could not be known.

The first time that the walrus tried this stunt, Eric, at the helm, swung the boat to one side by a quick movement of the rudder. But one might as easily attempt to escape from a grayhound on shore, as from one of these active, though, cumbersome denizens of the deep, when in his own element. Blowing a shower of salt-spray in the faces of the crew, on he came again. Rearing his huge shoulders out of the water, he thrust his head forward and lunged at the boat. He was too close to shoot at.

CHAPTER V.

THE BEGINNING OF THE END.

THE boat which the walrus was attacking contained Eric Redmond and Angus Selkirk, five of their assistants, and two Eskimos. If the walrus should succeed in his evident

intention of wrecking it, there would be no North Pole for Eric and Angus.

But at this moment one of the boys, standing up in his place, thrust the end of the blade of his oar full between the eyes of the whiskered face, and bore on the handle with all of his weight. The black head fell back into the water again, just clear of the boat. The beast's two ivory hooks missed the gunwale by the narrowest fraction of an inch.

Then on came the beast for the third time, madder than ever.

In the excitement, the mate had drawn nearer and nearer in his *kayak*; and now he cast discretion to the winds and his harpoon at the walrus. Sensing a new enemy, the beast did a combined dive and somersault, hitting the boat a terrible crack with his hind flippers in the process, and then, bobbing suddenly head and shoulders out of the water like a spar-buoy, loomed above the unarmed man who had assaulted him.

The whale boat spun around under the impact of the blow. But as the crew dug their oars into the water to steady the craft, Eric and Angus opened fire, and the huge beast sank again before reaching the mate.

But this was not the end of the episode, for the sealskin buoy on the *kayak* failed to clear, and as the mate sat there gloating over his escape, his frail canoe suddenly did a tail-dive, and followed the walrus.

Just what happened beneath the surface will never be known, but the mate managed to get out his hunting knife and cut himself free from his boat, before his wind gave out. As he came gasping to the surface, willing hands grabbed him and hauled him into the dory.

By this time the rest of the herd had started paddling off to the northward, pursued by the natives in their *kayaks*, so Eric and Angus fired at the retreating beasts, until they were out of range.

Later the Eskimos returned and gathered up the prey, a total of five victims, which the gasoline winch hauled up onto the beach.

The natives were thus well repaid for their hospitality and the boys had had the sport they came after, but the expedition had narrowly escaped disaster.

A great feast that evening celebrated the successful outcome of the hunt.

The next morning, May 2, as a cold south wind had driven back the ice again, the plane was run down into the water.

A few days before, they had heard over their radio of the successful, though perilous, landing of Byrd's plane at Kings Bay, Spitzbergen; and that the Amundsen-Ellsworth-Nobile dirigible Norge was already flying toward Spitzbergen. This meant speeding things up considerably, if the expedition of the Milwaukee *Eagle* was to have any chance of victory at all.

Everything seemed auspicious for the next step of the journey, which was to consist in transporting a plane-load of supplies eastward over the inland ice and then northward as far as this ice proved smooth enough to afford a safe landing place. There a cache was to be made, and the plane was to return for another and final load for the polar trip.

If a suitable place should be found on the first flight, a camp was to be established, several further flights made, and the rest of the party and provisions be brought up.

No one except the two flyers was let in on the real object. Ostensibly the flights were for reconnaissance for game, and to establish a hunting base, if big game should be discovered. But Redmond gave the mate strict instructions that, if they did not return from any of their flights, no search was to be made for them; but, after a reasonable wait, the rest of the party were to make their way along the shore to

Kristianshaab, and there remain until the Coolidge arrived.

NOW, for the first time, the two adventurers donned real Arctic clothing: undershirts of soft doe-skin, a buttonless jacket of sheep's fleece with the wool inside, a hood of the same material edged with fox-tails to keep the wind from getting in around the face, trousers of shaggy polar-bear fur, waterproof boots of sealskin soled with the heavier hide of the square-flipper seal, and fox-fur mittens. All, except the jacket, had been bartered from the Eskimos since their arrival.

Earphones inside the hoods, and a mouthpiece on their chests similar to those used by phone girls, permitted communication between them. The whole could be plugged into sockets in the plane.

The wing surfaces were paraffined, and the windshield wiped with glycerin, to discourage the formation of ice. The gasoline tanks were filled. The supplies and firearms and instruments were loaded aboard. All was ready for the trip.

After a stability test and loaded flight, the plane took off, circled to gain altitude, and then headed east toward the glacial fringe of the solid icecap of Greenland.

As they rose, they noticed a large flock of some black species of duck, buzzing rapidly southward like overgrown bumble-bees.

"Ducks flying south for the summer," announced Angus into his transmitter.

"You're crazy," replied Eric, "ducks fly *north* in summer, and south in winter!"

"All the same," Angus rejoined, "these ducks are flying south, and it's the beginning of the summer."

"Perhaps they are just circling," Eric suggested.

"No," said Angus positively, "I heard the old chief talking to the mate about it, and he said, as the mate trans-

lated it to me, that the ducks around here always fly south in the spring; and, when the fall comes, they fly north again to get out of the cold."

"I'll give it up," said Eric, "though it does seem to fit in with the warm north wind that we have been wondering about."

"To say nothing of Ultima Thule, the land of the Hyperboreans," added the Scot.

"But that's mere mythology, of course," insisted Redmond. "Besides, it's contrary to nature."

"Like radio, and flying, and a number of other things which I might mention," commented the Scot.

They flew along in silence for awhile, Redmond at the stick, Selkirk at the instruments and plotting-board. After about an hour, they passed the glacial fringe. The ice below them showed rough and streaked with crevasses, but soon smoothed out as they neared the interior.

The formation of the icecap of Greenland is most interesting. The entire continent is covered with a smooth dome of ice, shaped like an enormous watch-crystal.

The outward pressure of this huge mass of ice, replenished by snow and rain, causes its edges to creep slowly toward the shore on all sides. At the edges it forms into glaciers in the fiords and breaks off into icebergs which float away to sea. Here and there in the interior the smooth expanse is broken by *nunataks*, sharp, black peaks of rock protruding through the ice. Such is the central icecap of the continent of Greenland.

ABOUT an hour and twenty minutes after their start, their observations and calculations showed them that they had reached the fiftieth meridian. At this point they turned due north, for their solar compasses were set for that longitude.

A solar compass is the inverse of a sun-dial. If a sun-dial is pointed due

north, it tells the time. If a solar compass is set to the correct time, it points due north. But in either case, as time is entirely a matter of longitude, the time in question is the solar time for the longitude of the observer.

Almost every woodsman has learned, at some time or other in his life, how to tell direction by his watch. You point the hour-hand at the sun, and then the direction halfway between twelve and the hour-hand will be south. If the watch had a twenty-four-hour dial, the necessity for finding the half-way mark would be eliminated, and twenty-four would always point north, whenever the hour-hand was pointed at the sun.

As the night had not been much more than six hours long, and as they had made an early start, it was only nine o'clock when they turned north.

Three hours later, at seventy-five degrees north latitude, they passed through a brief flurry of snow from the northward. As the flakes fell upon the plane, Eric exclaimed: "Why, they're red! Who ever heard of red snow?"

"I have," replied his companion. "This red snow is frequently encountered in the Arctic. Scientists, who have studied the phenomenon, say that the color is caused by pollen from some kind of plant."

"What kind of plant?" asked Eric.

"No one knows," answered Angus. "All they know is that it is pollen from a plant, but they don't know what kind nor where it grows."

"Bosh!" asserted Eric. "The North Pole can't have any beyond, for the pole is as far north as there is."

Again they sailed on in silence. Every hour or so they changed places, so as to relieve the monotony. Time dragged very slowly. The hands of their chronometers were leaden. At their great height above sea level, the cold was intense, even when the wind blew from the north.

At half past four in the afternoon,

a clinometer reading on the sun indicated that they had reached eighty-one degrees north latitude. They saw before them the roughnesses and cracks of the edge of the central ice. Their altimeter showed them that they were nearing sea level again. Eric Redmond was at the plotting board at the time.

Said he: "The day is young yet. Let's swing northeast, where the land runs much further north than it does here."

This was done. An hour and a half later, they crossed a fiord. Then land again, but this land was rocky and not covered with snow and ice.

"Let's keep on to the end of this, and see where it goes to," suggested Eric. "Then we must turn back, for we can't land here."

At half past seven they reached the northern limits of Greenland. Below them was a little bay, with open water! An ideal place for landing. Down they volplaned, then taxied slowly to the shore.

The two adventurers could scarcely believe their eyes. Or their other senses, for that matter.

Ice-free water, lazily lapping a rather steep sandy beach. Beyond that rose an evidently fertile upland, lush with green grass and brilliantly-colored flowers. Butterflies flitting lazily about. Bees droning amid the flowers. A herd of musk-ox browsing on the meadow, and the whole scene flanked by gray birch and towering cliffs.

Temperature: seventy degrees! The pair hurried to shed their Arctic garments.

"SO this is Paris!" quoted Angus. "Too bad my namesake, Eric the Red, didn't settle here, when he tricked his countrymen into colonizing South Greenland, by giving it a fertile-sounding name," commented Eric.

"Well, anyhow," said the Scot, "your hero, Peary, is vindicated on one count. I never before believed his

story that he and Astrup found identically these conditions, when they crossed northern Greenland in 1892. With this evidence of his truthfulness, perhaps he really discovered the pole, after all."

But Redmond sadly shook his head.

"Peary couldn't have," said he. "He would have had to have traveled much faster than is humanly possible over Arctic ice."

"How do you know?" countered Selkirk. "You've never traveled over Arctic ice, except by plane; and not even by plane until to-day."

"That's so," admitted the other.

The spot seemed an ideal one for their northernmost cache. So they made camp and killed a musk-ox for supper.

Not to be outdone by the ancient Norsemen, they named the place Palm Beach.

Then they took observations, to verify their position as shown by their chart. First an accurate north-and-south line was staked out, by means of their Pickering star-compass. This device may be briefly described as follows:

A single eye-piece enables the observer to look simultaneously through a two-branched telescope pointed upward. These branches are so arranged that when one is pointed at the North Star and the other at the next brightest star of the Little Dipper, the zero line on the horizontal dial of the machine will point due north, and the vertical dial of the machine will read the latitude.

A sun cap enables these bright stars to be seen even at midday. No computations, and no knowledge of either time or longitude, are needed, although these are indispensable to all other precise methods of north determination.

The results, as to direction, were checked by rough measurements with sun-compass and gyroscopic compass; and, as to latitude, by sextant.

The total result of their observations and calculations showed that they were at $83^{\circ}3'$ north latitude and $30^{\circ}6'$ west longitude. The time was the afternoon of May 2, 1926.

About midnight they turned in and slept, in spite of its being broad daylight. When they awoke it was the afternoon of May 3, and the sun was just rising. Another polar paradox!

You see, their little harbor fronted north. At this time of year, so near to the pole, the sun circled the sky at nearly a constant height. At midday, when the sun was due south, it was hidden by the cliffs and all was dusk. At midnight, when the sun was due north, it shone full upon them. Thus when the sun appeared from behind the cliffs about 6 P.M., it might be said to be "rising"; and when it disappeared again behind the cliffs about 6 A.M., it might be said to be "setting."

"This will mix our days all up," complained Eric.

"All we can do is to reform our calendar," suggested Angus. "Instead of calling this the afternoon of May 3, as it really is, we shall have to call it the morning of May 3-4."

When that had been agreed to, he continued: "Well, let's unload our supplies and start back."

"Let's not," suggested Eric. "Look here. This Palm Beach place, which we have discovered, has plenty of food here already. We have enough gasoline to get to the pole and back to our friends, if nothing happens. And if anything does happen, a few hundred gallons of gas more or less won't help us. Let's go on to the pole to-day!"

"Agreed," said Angus; and they shook hands on it.

THEIR observations of the day before were verified, not to see whether they had moved during the night, but merely because two observations taken a whole night apart are less apt to contain some error in

common, than two observations taken within a few minutes of each other. Then some musk-ox meat was loaded aboard, and off they started at 8 P.M. on the morning of May 3-4, 1926.

Due north they flew. It was a perfect day. Not very cold, although much colder than at Palm Beach. Clear, but with dark clouds hanging low on the northern horizon. No discernible wind.

At about 87° it was 11 P.M. The sun was nearly dead ahead, a point and a half off the port bow. And now the dark clouds to the northward obscured it.

Angus quoted: "And so he came to the Unshapen Land and the place which has no name. And seven days he walked through it, on a path which few can tell; for those who have trodden it like least to speak of it, and those who go there again in dreams are glad enough when they awake; till he came to the edge of the everlasting night, where the air was full of feathers and the soil was hard with ice. There was no living thing around, not a fly, not a moss upon the rocks. Neither seal nor sea-gull dare come near, lest the ice should catch them in its claws. The surge broke up in foam, but it fell back again in flakes of snow."

"What's that from?" asked Eric.

"Kingley's 'Perseus,'" was the reply.

"I could beat that quotation," claimed Eric, "if I had a copy of H. G. Wells's 'Time Machine' with me, where he describes the end of the world. Isn't this awful! It feels as though something were going to happen."

"Something is going to happen," remarked the Scot laconically, glancing at the instrument-board. "There's a leak in our gasoline line. We've got to land and plug it, or we'll have to land anyway."

"No place here to land," commented Eric. "The ice is too rough."

"It's a choice between landing under power now, and a forced landing a few minutes later."

"All right," assented Eric. "I'll try it."

For some distance the ship just skimmed above the ice; then, reaching a portion of the floe which seemed reasonably smooth for quite a distance, dropped to the surface. As soon as the power was shut off Selkirk closed all the fuel-pipes, and was gratified to find that the gas-meter immediately stopped dropping.

"The leak was beyond the petcocks," he shouted. "We shan't lose any more gas."

The rapidly slowing course of the plane was carrying it straight toward a lofty pinnacle of ice which projected from the level floe just ahead of them. As Eric steered to the right to avoid it, his left ski crumpled, swinging him abruptly to the left, bang into the face of the iceberg.

As the ship crashed, Eric was hurled among his controls, and Angus sprawled among his instruments. Extricating themselves, they got out to view the damage.

The left ski was gone, and one blade of the propeller was snapped off. That was all.

All? That was quite sufficient!

The two young men sat down abruptly on the ice and looked at each other. They said nothing. Their bodies slumped,

Stranded miles and miles from anywhere in a wrecked airplane! Little hope of reaching the pole. Less hope of ever getting home again. And just when things had been going so nicely. But they had the decency not to blame each other.

THEN the ridiculousness of their predicament dawned upon them.

A smile gradually began to overspread each of their faces. They drew a couple of long breaths and stood up again. So that was that!

"I think we can fix it," asserted Eric doubtfully.

"It's going to be a long job," replied his companion. "First take some observations to see where we are."

The storm had lifted and, although black clouds obscured the low-lying sun to the northward, a few stars could be seen overhead. Accordingly the Pickering telescope was brought out. Angus took several readings; 87° exactly.

Then Eric suggested that he walk a short distance away and verify the results by another series of sights.

"Better take full food and equipment," admonished his friend.

"Why on earth?" Eric snorted. "I can get right back to the plane."

"Don't be too sure of that," replied Angus. "These ice-floes have been known to crack suddenly through without warning. You might be marooned from me for a week by a narrow lead of water."

If he had thought there was the least danger of this happening, Eric would never have ventured away from the plane; but, just to keep his companion quiet, he ostentatiously fitted himself out with bedding and a copious supply of compressed rations before shouldering his instrument and starting forth. At a distance of about half a mile to the east he set up the telescope. Still 87°. Good!

But just as he was about to return, it settled down to snow again. He could not see the plane nor even the ice-pinnacle by which it stood, but he could keep his direction by maintaining his line of travel at a constant angle with the direction of the driving snow. So he pressed on, undismayed, and finally reached the iceberg.

But there was no plane there. He circled the berg. No plane on any side of it.

For a moment panic seized him; but then he had the good sense to take himself in hand and calm down. If

this wasn't the correct berg, it couldn't be very far away.

So, spreading his blankets in the lee of the huge wall of ice, he turned in to await the lifting of the storm. Selkirk's hunch about the blankets and the supplies hadn't been such a bad one after all.

He slept. When he awoke, the snow had drifted all around him. But the weather was clear.

His first act on awaking was again to circle the berg. No plane. He scanned the horizon. There were other bergs projecting here and there in the distance, but no black objects by them.

"Of course not," was his comment. "Probably covered with snow by now."

After breakfasting from his compressed rations, he took an observation with his telescope. Still 87°. Therefore the only thing to do was to travel back and forth, east and west, at that latitude, until he found the plane.

So he marched to the east much farther than he could possibly have come during the storm. Then he tried an equal distance to the west. He investigated every ice-projection at a reasonable distance to the north and south.

But there was no plane beside any of them.

He returned to the iceberg by which he had spent the night. He carefully studied its configuration. He became convinced that this was where he had left the plane.

And then he realized that the trouble was not that he couldn't find where the plane had been, but rather that the plane was gone!

And Angus Selkirk was gone with it!

It was impossible that Angus either could or would have flown away during the storm. But nevertheless he was gone.

Eric was in despair!

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK.

Big Man

By **FRED MACISAAC**

Author of "The Impulsive Mr. Morrison," "The Spectral Passenger," etc.

Dangers confront a big business executive that lesser men are safe from—as the great Phin Holbrook discovered, at the crisis of his career

Novelette—Complete

CHAPTER I.

THE GENIAL DICTATOR.

BEHIND his back, Phineas G. Holbrook, president of Federal Assimilators, was known as Jumbo. He was a Brobdingnagian man; six feet two; fifty inches around the chest, more at the waist-band; loud-voiced, heavy-handed, arrogant, bumptious, and, all in all, rather magnificent.

Twenty-five years ago Phin, then known as Bull Holbrook, had played guard for Yale, and when he went back to carry the ball, as guards were wont to do in the good old days, neither Harvard nor Princeton could stop him. He had weighed two hundred and ten pounds then; he weighed two hundred and seventy now—a big man for a big job.

And the presidency of Federal was a big job. It was the largest corporation in the Pelham group of industrial corporations, able to pay its president a hundred thousand dollars a year and pour big dividends into the pockets of its expatriate proprietor, Gustavus Pelham. Not only was Holbrook boss of Federal, but he was chairman of the advisory board of the other five or six Pelham corporations.

As he sat before his great desk in



He made no attempt to answer her tirade

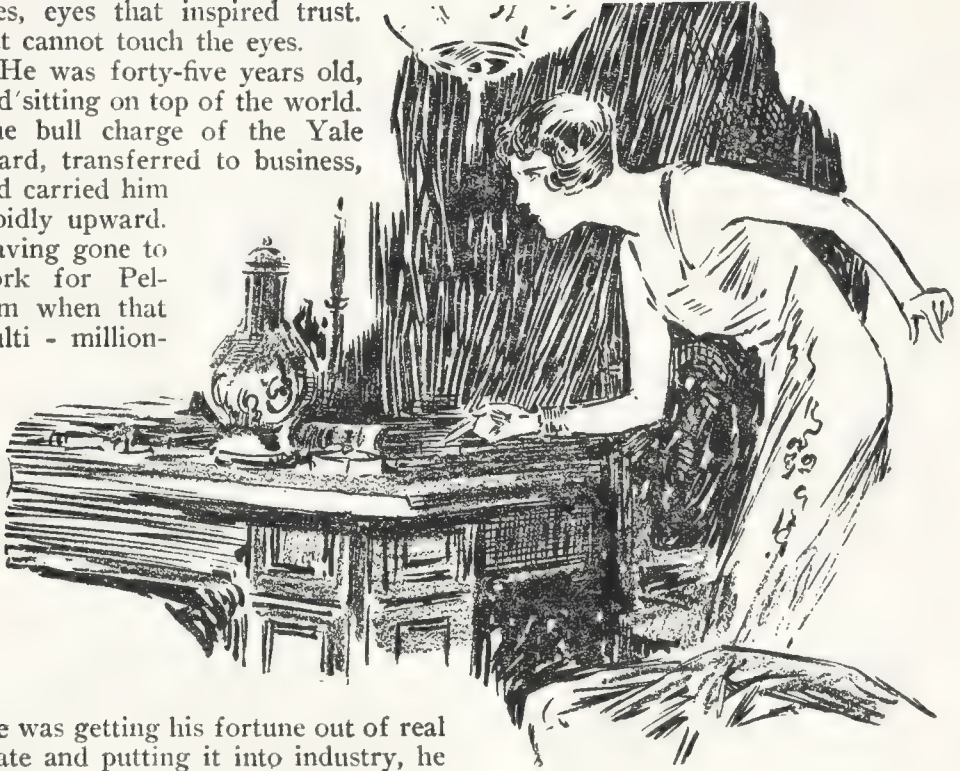
his overpoweringly gorgeous private office—Federal occupied three floors of a big office building on lower Broadway, and there were ten factories for making assimilators in various parts of the country—he looked like a benevolent Buddha.

He had a big, broad nose which was still dominating despite his huge, flabby cheeks, his mouth was large and determined, and the chin would have indicated great force of character were it not for a set of pendulous jowls. The broad shoulders were humped with fat, and a huge paunch made the crossing of his legs an operation so difficult as no longer to be attempted.

His hair had receded, leaving a dome-like forehead; it was still brown, and he had a pair of very fine deep blue

eyes, eyes that inspired trust. Fat cannot touch the eyes.

He was forty-five years old, and sitting on top of the world. The bull charge of the Yale guard, transferred to business, had carried him rapidly upward. Having gone to work for Pelham when that multi-million-



aire was getting his fortune out of real estate and putting it into industry, he had been chiefly responsible for the tremendous success of Federal Assimilators, and now that Pelham resided permanently in Paris, he was the grand vizier to the absent sultan.

Success had mellowed Phin Holbrook, and it was well known in Federal that he was as soft-hearted as he was fat. He reveled in his popularity with his employees, and even if he had bribed his workers to love him by shorter hours, better pay, more comfortable working conditions and longer vacations than they could get elsewhere, he had benefited Pelham thereby, since a more loyal and enthusiastic personnel did not exist.

Mr. Holbrook had just arrived at his office, the hour being about eleven-thirty, and had entirely forgotten he had made an appointment with his lawyer for ten-thirty. Mr. Stephen Grossmith, the lawyer, entered with fire in his eye.

"Look here, Phin; my time is very valuable. I've been waiting an hour."

"Slipped my mind," said Holbrook as though the fact were amusing. "You may charge me for the time. You would anyway."

Grossmith sat down in an overstuffed chair which belonged in a library instead of an office. He was a slim, nervous, wiry, old young man with a small gray mustache and a head almost completely bald.

"I'VE looked up the title of that Long Island house. It's O K, but you can't afford to buy it," the lawyer declared.

"Only seventy-five thousand. I've got the money," Holbrook protested.

"Perhaps, but very little more. You spend your salary as though it were income."

"It is, practically. Have a cigar?"

"No, I wouldn't smoke one of your big black baseball bats. How much money have you got, Phin?"

Holbrook folded his fat hands on

his paunch and pursed his big thick lips. "I don't know. Maybe a hundred and fifty thousand."

"In twenty years you've earned two millions. Blown it in. You can't afford that ark on Long Island."

"My wife likes it," replied Holbrook in a tone which meant, "that settles that."

Grossmith stood up. "As you please. I'm on my way."

"Wait a few minutes, Steve, and we'll all go to lunch."

"Lunch," repeated the lawyer. "Why, you just finished your breakfast. No wonder you look like a pink sea elephant."

"Weasel," retorted Holbrook. "I've got a good organization here, Steve, and it doesn't matter when I come in. As for lunch, I take the boys with me and we do a day's work pleasantly with our legs under a table."

Grossmith, who knew Holbrook so intimately that he dared be thoroughly insolent, emitted a scornful snort. "Yes, you do. You settle the winners of horse races, prize fights and baseball games. Do you know what's the matter with you?"

Phin's moon face began to crimson. "Nothing. Not a thing."

"You're dead and you don't know it. You ought to be stuffed and put in a dime museum."

"Bet you fifty thousand dollars I live longer than you do," retorted Jumbo.

"Bet you haven't got fifty thousand dollars," was the lawyer's last fling as the door slammed behind him.

Phin chuckled tolerantly and pressed a buzzer for the general manager, who responded almost immediately. The big man had hired Frank Havens as an office boy some twenty years ago and carried him up the ladder with him. The salary of the slim, dark, alert and efficient man of thirty-five who sauntered in was twenty-five thousand dollars a year. Holbrook would have staked his life on the

loyalty of Frank Havens, and he would have won.

"Collect the gang and we'll go to lunch," instructed Jumbo.

"All right, chief. Let's leave Mercer out. He's a damn good salesman, but I'm fed up with his company."

Distress wrote itself upon the massive countenance. "I hate to do that, Frank. What's the trouble?"

Havens thrust his hands in his trousers pockets and whistled soundlessly.

"Out with it," Phin insisted.

"Well, he's too friendly to Luke Peabody of Pelham Monopole."

To consider this in all its phases, Holbrook removed his cigar and contemplated the lighted end of it. "Why not?" he demanded. "Peabody is a Pelham man."

"He'd like to be president of Federal," Havens said significantly.

The giant laughed good-naturedly. "Of course he would. So would a lot of people."

"Well, he's a mole. That vacation trip of his last month was only a ruse to call upon Pelham in Paris."

"Lot of good that would do him. Leave Mercer out if you like, but let's go to lunch."

PHINEAS HOLBROOK was at his best during these luncheon conferences, as he called them. He devoured vast quantities of food and radiated good will and sociability. Years ago he had accomplished much business as he sat with his lieutenants and discussed assimilators, and he was still under the impression that lunch was of great importance to Federal. A table seating eight was always reserved for him at the Industrial Club, and his entrance with his suite never failed to create a stir in the dining room, which did not annoy Phineas.

Luncheon began to-day with an attempt by Frank Havens to discuss office affairs, but Phineas was soon launched upon the subject of contract bridge, upon which he considered him-

self an authority, and his loud dicta drew bridge players from other tables, who were invited to seat themselves.

If Jumbo was the autocrat of the lunch table, he was an interesting monologist. To interrupt him it was necessary to talk louder than he did, which was impossible. If anybody had ever won an argument with him, Phineas never had recognized the fact.

Success, of course, was the trouble with Phineas. Like many powerful and ruthless men, he had a lazy streak, and for five or six years he had grown indolent, secure in the efficiency of his general manager. Never lacking in self-appreciation, he had gradually permitted his egotism to inflate itself, just as overeating and drinking had inflated his splendid body.

And probably he had begun to touch big money too early in life. All it meant to him was something to spend. He tossed cash right and left, and rarely received full value for his expenditures. He was a notorious check grabber, almost as objectionable a type as a tightwad. With vision enough to construct for Gustavus Pelham a great commercial edifice, he had never been interested in building a fortune for himself.

As he looked at it, a hundred thousand a year was the income of two millions of dollars, and no man in New York was more firmly intrenched in office than himself. His salary was practically income, as he had told Steve Grossmith.

He liked to spend money himself, and he had a young wife who excelled him as a spender. He had met Ruth at a cocktail party on Park Avenue when he was forty and she was twenty. She had been a model in a Fifth Avenue fur house, a strikingly beautiful creature, dark, graceful, volatile and not especially intelligent, but she knew a good thing when she saw it, and Phineas G. Holbrook, who was not so fat then, didn't have to urge her very hard to accept his heart and hand.

With the best will in the world she married him and thrust her bare arms into his treasure chest, to toss, with his smiling approval, its contents to the four winds. Even in New York it is difficult for a family of two to spend a hundred thousand a year, but the Holbrooks could do it.

After two hours at lunch and an hour of petty detail at the office, Phineas went home to their twenty-five thousand dollar a year apartment on Park Avenue, where he broke the good news that they were going to buy the house on Long Island.

"We'll keep this apartment, of course," she said carelessly.

"I suppose so. Grossmith warns me it will cost a lot to keep up that house."

"Pooh! He would talk like that. You can afford it, can't you, old Cræsus?"

The fat man beamed. "You bet. Come sit on my lap."

Mrs. Holbrook laughed scornfully. "Impossible. You have no lap."

She tweaked his big nose and ran into her chamber.

CHAPTER II.

DISASTER.

NO man in New York was as sure of his job as Phineas Holbrook, yet the following day came disaster. It came in the form of a cablegram, the first message from Pelham, relating to business, in a couple of years. It filled the president of Federal with windy fury, and to Frank Havens he looked as though he would burst like a balloon.

"Because of your increasing responsibilities with Federal," said the message, "I am relieving you of chairmanship of the board of management of Pelham corporations. Appointing Peabody."

"What's the game?" bellowed Holbrook. "I ask you, what's the game?"

Havens shrugged his shoulders and turned outward the palms of his hands. "Peabody has put one over on you. Your only chance is to sail at once for Europe and have it out with Pelham." Frank gazed sharply at his chief. Inertia.

"Damn it, I can't. Ruth is all fussed up about moving into the country. I won't go without her."

"This fellow wants your job," persisted the general manager.

"Now look here, Frank. There's no salary to the chairmanship of the board and no authority. It's only a foolish title. Let him have it. He can't interfere with me." He was pleading like a schoolboy to his master.

Havens inspected him through half-closed eyes. "You haven't seen Pelham for years, have you?" He dared not tell his chief that Pelham probably would be shocked at his appearance. In five years Holbrook had magnified physically and ossified mentally.

"Peabody can't butt in," asserted Phineas, who was obviously trying to reconcile himself to the loss of the chairmanship. "The general management follows the policy of non-interference with a corporation which shows a profit. Let the rat have the empty honor. I don't care."

Havens had seated himself on his chief's desk and kicked his heels against the mahogany side of it.

"There never has been any politics in Pelham corporations because you wouldn't stand for that sort of thing, but politics is in now. Peabody has intrigued for the chairmanship of the board for no other purpose than to poke his long nose into this business. Take a chance and jump a steamer."

"How can he affect us?" demanded the president.

"Well, he has been making a great fuss in Monopole with efficiency methods. He has a man named Fraser who is supposed to have reduced costs twenty per cent. He'll get Pelham's consent to send him over here. We are

a bright shining mark for an efficiency expert, and Peabody knows it."

"We are making more money than all the other corporations put together," shouted Holbrook.

"Sure. Your policy has won results; but you can't expect an efficiency man to appreciate your liberality. You pay salaries out of all proportion to what is paid for similar work elsewhere. Pelham will be told you are liberal at his expense."

"By Judas!" bellowed Holbrook, whose face was on fire. "My policy had produced such loyalty and *esprit de corps* that extra expense has been paid twice over by extra business."

"You can't prove that by an efficiency man. We've got to keep Fraser out of Federal."

The old leader flashed into view for a minute. "Right, Frank. As we used to say in football, the best defense is a good offense. I won't wait for Peabody to undermine me. I'll strike first. I'll demand Peabody's head on a charger and get it."

"No, no! You're already undermined. Cable Pelham approval of the appointment, but ask that Peabody be forbidden to interfere in any way with your successful management of Federal."

"No, sir! No halfway measures. Give Peabody time and he may persuade the old man that I am not indispensable; but at present, if it comes to a showdown between Peabody and myself, he dare not back Peabody. I will demand that he be discharged from the organization. It's Peabody or myself."

"You can't do that. It's an ultimatum."

"You bet your life it's an ultimatum," he exclaimed. "Give me a cablegram. You see, Frank, my contract is up in a month. Pelham knows what I have done, and Peabody is still an unknown quantity. He's too shrewd to take chances."

"Don't cable. Go to Europe."

Holbrook silenced him with a wave of the hand. "This is quicker. I know my man."

SO certain was Phineas of victory that he was able to dismiss the matter completely from his mind, and the reply to the cablegram had been lying on his desk for several hours when he entered his office about eleven next morning, after his usual regal progress through the establishment.

He picked it up nervously, tore it open, stared, read it a second time, grasped at his huge chair and painfully lowered himself into it.

"Your attitude," he read, "makes further relations impossible. Peabody will take over your duties immediately and settle for balance of your contract."

Beaten. Tossed aside like a used towel. Superseded by a petty organization politician. Not even permitted to serve out his contract. This was Pelham's treatment of the honest steward who had doubled his fortune!

As Grossmith had warned him, he was, after all, only a salaried man, minister of an insolent and ungrateful despot. The fool, to throw overboard the expert helmsman for a tyro! It was Pelham's loss, not his. American business knew what he had done for Federal. He would have no trouble placing himself; but to be out of Federal—that was a frightful shock.

He had loved the business, and the worship of his people had been his meat and drink. How could he live without it? No matter how big his job in the future, it would never be like this. To the multitude on the pay roll, Pelham had never been anything but a name. It was Holbrook who had taken an insignificant invention and made it indispensable to the motor vehicles of the world.

Havens entered. "I see you have your reply," he said nervously.

Jumbo grinned painfully. "Chucked out," he said bitterly. "Peabody will

be here presently to take charge and I don't want to meet him. I might strangle the ferret-faced slimy intriguer."

His friend picked up and read the cablegram. "Evidently you did exactly what both Pelham and Peabody hoped," he said. "I can't tell you, sir—"

"I know. I know, my boy. I'm leaving now. I don't want to say good-by to anybody. I couldn't stand it."

"Shall I see you at lunch, sir?"

"Better not. It might be dangerous for you."

Havens laughed shortly. "I'll be at the club at the usual time. *Au revoir*."

As a great position glorifies its occupant and wraps in glamour even a negative individual, the loss of it may shrivel a most impressive personality. In a way the massive person of Holbrook had typified the greatness of Federal to the business world, and his beaming assurance, his grandiloquence, even his unctuousness, fitted the position like robes of office. But where he had been magnificent he was now grotesque, because he clung to his mannerisms the more defiantly now that there was no longer justification for them. Daily he loomed up at the club for luncheon, but only Havens came to join him, and in his effort to appear unconcerned at his dethronement he was more bombastic than ever before.

For the first week his malaise was entirely due to his severance from Federal and his old associates, and his concern was for the future in incompetent hands of the business which he had constructed. He even worried about the little people, and his pensioners, who would surely be cut off by the ax of efficiency. At the end of ten days, however, his point of view began to shift and his own future commenced to cause him uneasiness as big business seemed to be evincing no interest in the availability of a mighty force.

Frank Havens was more worried than Phineas, because he knew there is no more empty aphorism than that there is plenty of room at the top. Despite bombastic statements by captains of industry, there is no frantic search for hundred-thousand-dollar-a-year men. Frank knew that Holbrook had been a marvelous executive, but he was aware that slothfulness had devoured the genius which built Federal, and while Jumbo's bulk had been impressive in office, as a job-hunter he did not suggest a hum-dinger. That for years Holbrook had been only a figurehead in Federal was suspected in high places.

AFTER a month he considered establishing a company to manufacture assimilators in competition with Federal, and he called on Grossmith to ask him to help interest capital. The lawyer was brutal.

"Don't think of it, old man. You were a big executive with unlimited money behind you then, but you need at least a million dollars to give you elbow room. You couldn't run a small concern. Why don't you land a big salaried job?"

"Because they think I've lost my grip," bitterly admitted the ex-Napoleon of business.

"Well, if you hadn't you wouldn't have allowed that shrimp Peabody to trim you. For years I have been advising you to save your money. If you had a million you could thumb your nose at the world. I suggest you make that wife of yours realize that she is married to a poor man. At the rate you live you'll be broke in a year."

"You leave my wife out of our discussion," Phineas snarled, the more furious because Grossmith had placed a finger upon one of his biggest problems. Ruth was making trouble.

Alarmed at the stopping of her husband's income, the effect of her concern was to make her spend more wildly than ever. Grossmith had broken

off the deal for the house, and she had taken this in bad part while she ignored the timid efforts of Phineas to check her expenditures.

At the end of eight weeks nothing had turned up to his advantage. Though many men in his situation would have taken to drink, Holbrook, a heavy drinker, became a teetotaler, and, despite many years of smoking heavy Havana cigars, he had stopped because their taste sickened him. Always a voracious eater, he lost his appetite and he was losing weight. Worry can peel the flesh off a person more quickly than anything else, and he had plenty to worry him.

Following a tip that Stella Steel needed a big man to operate their plants, he called upon Raymond Dutton, head of the banking house which controlled the corporation, an old acquaintance, and asked for the job.

"You are too expensive, Holbrook," said Dutton bluntly. "It won't pay more than fifty thousand."

"I'll take that," he said eagerly.

The old banker shook his head and evaded his eye. "You are too old a man for us."

"I'm only forty-five," he urged.

"Sorry. We need another sort of executive."

Phineas rose heavily. "You don't want me at any price. I understand."

THAT night he thought it time to have a heart-to-heart talk with Ruth, but he got no further than a protest against a batch of bills she had handed him when she flew into a rage and deluged him with reproaches.

Slumped in his big chair, legs outstretched, his arms hanging limp, his head on his breast, he took her tirade like a beaten dog. When she paused for breath he ventured a phrase.

"I thought you loved me," he sighed.

The girl stood in front of him, her dark eyes flashing, twisting her dress in her fingers in her excitement.

"I did," she exclaimed. "I loved big, hearty, brave Phin Holbrook, the president of Federal, the man who gave me everything I wanted. I was proud of you. I thought you were wonderful. I never knew what you really were."

"Ruth!" he protested.

"I'll tell you what you were, a swell-headed *Falstaff* who was too stupid to hold his job. What right have you to own a woman like me if you can't support me? Get up and do something. Are you just old and fat and finished? I'm young. I want a husband. Do you understand?"

"What can I do?" he moaned.

She stamped her foot. "Go out and take the world by the throat. That's the kind of man for me." Sebbing hysterically, she ran out of the room, and he heard her weeping in her chamber.

While a clerk out of work may answer advertisements and sit meekly in anterooms until he gets employment, a man like Phineas Holbrook may not go about, hat in hand, because the post he must have seeks the individual; it is not to be solicited. All he could do was put out feelers in hope of drawing an offer, but he could not explain this to a young woman who demanded action. All his real friends, men like Grossmith and Havens, were working in his interest, but the weeks continued to roll by without results.

Ruth was ashamed of her outburst, behaved gently and tried to let him see that she was sorry, actually wished to reduce her expenditures and did not know how to begin; but she had wounded him deeply and their relations were strained.

And Phineas was getting thin. He had dropped forty pounds, and had to get a new wardrobe. Suffering had wiped off his face its smugness and eliminated several of his chins. Long since he had stopped lunching at the Industrial Club because the well-meant inquiries of his acquaintances tortured

him. Frank Havens he had not seen for six weeks, when the young man called on him one afternoon at his apartment.

"Upon my word, chief," he exclaimed, "you're looking better than in years. Your eye is bright, and you've lost your paunch. Dieting?"

"Worrying," he said frankly. "I can't smoke, and it's months since I've had a drink. Frank, my brain was smothered in fat. I had this coming to me. For years I dumped all my work on you."

"Lucky for me. Peabody started in to ride me, but he soon discovered he needed me to run Federal. I came to tip you off to something. While I don't want to raise false hopes, there is a new crowd in charge of Excell Motors and Gordon will get the gate when they find the right man to replace him. Pulsifer is the works, and I've been talking to him about you. It seems word had got to him that you were all in, but I have assured him you are in your prime and exactly the man they need."

"I wish I believed it," sighed the shrunken Jumbo.

"You've got to believe it. Frankly, it's given me confidence just to look at you. Now here's the news. Pulsifer wants to talk to you and they'll let me know when to make an engagement."

"It's great of you to do this for me, Frank. I think I can sell myself to Pulsifer," Holbrook gratefully declared.

When his friend had gone he set himself at once to study motor conditions and, with hope to stimulate him, he astonished himself by his powers of concentration. Excell Motors would pay seventy-five thousand dollars a year. That seemed like an enormous salary, now, to Phineas Holbrook.

Three days later Havens called. For the first time in their long acquaintance he seemed ill at ease, and the big

man's heart sank at sight of him. He had a hangdog look.

"I don't know how to tell you this, chief," he stammered. "This morning Pulsifer sent for me. He said he had been investigating you and he was so convinced that you were not the man he needed that an interview is unnecessary."

Phineas smiled a blue smile. "Never mind, Frank. It was too good to be true. I'm just as grateful."

And then Havens flushed and seemed to have difficulty in expressing himself. "You—you know how I feel about you, chief."

"I think you are my only real friend."

"Well, here it is. Pulsifer wants me for the job."

The big man stared at him blankly.

"It seems he found out that I have been running Federal for years. He offers me a hundred thousand to take Excell Motors."

THE countenance of Phineas, no longer round and ruddy as of yore, grey flour-white, and he moistened dry lips with the tip of his tongue.

"Your contract?" he ejaculated.

"Only six months to run and they can persuade Pelham to let me off, because he thinks that Peabody is running Federal. Now, shall I take the job?"

Holbrook swallowed the lump in his throat.

"Why ask me?"

His friend looked him squarely in the eye. "Because, if you think that, in any way, I have betrayed your interests, if you have the slightest suspicion that I threw you over to get this place myself, I'll refuse it."

Tears welled in the eyes of his former chief and the muscles of the lips twitched, then he rose and laid one of his big hands on the shoulder of the younger man.

"Take it, boy," he commanded.

"You deserve it. That they prefer you to me is my misfortune, not your fault, and I believe they are right. You are like a trained athlete and I am out of training. You'll deliver and—er—when you have a chance to look around, you may find a small post from which a man might work up. If you do, I wish you'd give it to me."

Havens stared. "Do you mean that? You couldn't take a small job. It might be only five or six thousand a year."

"Which, I suspect, may be all I'm really worth," Holbrook replied with a pinched smile.

"By God, it's not!" the young man exclaimed. "You'll get anything I can find. Chief, I confess I shared the general impression that you had shot your bolt. For a couple of years it was impossible to get you to concentrate on business. Now, why you're a new man!"

"I woke up too late. Now, Frank, take your big job with my blessing. And I know that my example will be a warning to you never to get a swelled head."

After Havens had departed, Holbrook pitched into the slough of despond. This had been his last hope, and it was evident that there was no room for him at the top. Forty-five years old, and he must forget past achievements and begin somewhere low down on the ladder. To an ordinary salaried man five thousand a year is admirable, but to Phineas it spelled dire poverty. And he might have to wait six months before Frank dared make a place for him with Excell Motors.

During the past five or six months he supposed he had been suffering, but his real torment began now. Frank he loved and respected, but it was gall and vinegar to him to realize that his former office boy had been chosen in his place for a great executive position. He had been tried in the balance and found wanting. Most painful of

all was the feeling that Pulsifer had probably decided wisely.

He sat in his great chair gazing into vacancy until Ruth returned, for a wonder, in a gay mood.

"What news of the big job!" she demanded. He looked into her eager face, beautiful, apparently concerned for him, but really for herself.

"I don't get it," he said bluntly. "They have chosen elsewhere."

"Oh," she exclaimed. "Oh, I'm sorry."

"It seems there is general agreement with the opinion of me you so eloquently expressed not long ago," he added bitterly. "I am a shell, burned out, useless. Just a great hulking *Falstaff*. You had better leave me, Ruth. I won't be able to keep you properly."

CHAPTER III.

A SURPRISING DECISION.

RUTH seated herself, leaned her elbow on the arm of her chair and rested her chin on the palm of her hand.

"I told you I was angry that night," she said. "You might stop casting it up to me. I am not going to leave you. I probably won't be much help to you, because you have spoiled me completely; I don't know how to economize, and I don't know much of anything, but I know that you're not a shell. Why, you look younger than you did when I married you."

"Thanks," he said dully. "If you remain with me we've got to change our manner of living. We have spent sixty or seventy thousand dollars since I left Federal, and have earned nothing.

"I shall, of course, find something to do, but my days of drawing an enormous salary seem to have gone forever. I asked Frank Havens to find me anything. I told him I would take five thousand a year."

"But we spend that much a month

at least," she exclaimed with terrified eyes.

"I have about twenty or thirty thousand dollars left. We'll be broke in three or four months at our present rate of living," he added.

He watched this sink in. This was the first time he had found her in a reasonable mood since the catastrophe.

Her little foot tapped the floor.

"What do you want me to do?" she asked.

"Find a cheap apartment away up town and spend nothing except for necessities of life until I have found a position."

She gulped. "All right," she said slowly. "In two months, the end of the quarter, I suppose. The rent is paid until then, isn't it?"

"Ruth," he exclaimed, and again there were tears in his eyes, "I didn't expect this. I can't tell you how wonderfully it makes me feel."

"I think it's horrible," she replied. "Horrible! I don't like it. I expect to be perfectly miserable, but I'll play the game."

"You don't have to," he assured her. "Your jewels must be worth fifty thousand dollars. You can sell them and leave me if you like."

She eyed him speculatively. "I suppose that's what you expect me to do. Well, I'll stick. I'm betting on you yet. And if necessary, the jewels go into the pot. Let's go and see a show to-night."

Her loyalty, which he had not dared to expect, and her confidence, buoyed him up immeasurably and sustained him through weeks of discouragement that followed. She had let him see that he could depend upon her for a certain amount of support and her willingness to sacrifice her jewels for the common weal touched him, though he promised himself that she would not be allowed to sell them. She accepted suggestions for economy in a good spirit now; dispensed with two of the three servants and ceased to run wild

at the stores, yet their expenses still appalled him as his resources diminished.

In his effort to secure employment he inserted blind advertisements in trade magazines and he let it be known that he would accept a subordinate position, salary not important, though he was aware that he was not likely to get such a job.

When a man who has been at the head of a big business is turned out, he finds it almost impossible to get a minor post. Holbrook, himself, magnanimous as he was, had felt obliged to refuse applications from men who had been executives because he was certain they would make unsatisfactory employees. Such men were usually sour or broken in spirit, embittered and resentful, spoiled for discipline by their period of authority, discontented and often insubordinate. Because of his own former importance, managers would be afraid to employ him.

And as his money flowed out in a steady stream he committed the error of many desperate men and attempted to augment his funds by gambling.

After studying the stock market for several weeks, he decided that certain securities were due for a rise and he plunged with most of his resources upon a ten point margin. A rumor of war in Europe caused a big drop in all stocks and wiped him out.

Nine months from the day he had sent an insolent ultimatum to Gustavus Pelham, Phineas G. Holbrook was practically penniless. There remained in his checking account about seven hundred dollars, which would vanish in a fortnight even at their reduced rate of expenditure. Ruth was away for the day when the ticker told him what had happened. He returned to the apartment in a condition little removed from insanity.

Despite the best will in the world, Frank Havens had found it impossible to make a place for him in Excell Motors, because he had a hostile board of

directors. On the horizon was not a speck of promise. Not a dot.

THE furnishings of the apartment would bring perhaps fifteen thousand dollars at a forced sale and Ruth's jewels might sell for forty or fifty thousand. To live on funds secured in such a way would debase him in his own estimation, and the world's. Her spirit had risen to meet their misfortune. Though he doubted very much if she still loved him, she had been loyal and faithful even though she had occasionally complained. She deserved a better fate than to be tied to a worthless hulk, supporting him upon the receipts of the sale of her jewels and household goods. They might live unhappily two or three years on these funds and then what? Better for her if he were dead. Much better. There was an insurance policy of one hundred and fifty thousand dollars in her favor. In three months the annual premium would be due and he could not meet it.

As all his troubles were of his own manufacture and his predicament well deserved, his pride forbade him appealing to his friends for financial assistance.

He looked down the long corridor of the years to come and saw himself slinking and cringing, a poor old has-been, hating himself and despised by everybody. Ruth's patience probably would not last long. In a few months or years, after they had eaten her bracelets and her rings and necklace, she would have to leave him. She had played the game better than he had dared hope, and no one could blame her, least of all himself, if she were forced to abandon the wreck.

Many a man in his position would go into his chamber, load a revolver and blow his useless brains out. One reads about the suicide of bankrupts every day. Often it was the best thing they could do for their families and themselves. It was almost expected of them.

He couldn't do that. He was a

strong man, a big man and he wasn't yellow. Future punishment did not alarm him; it was not a matter of religion or ethics; he simply felt he was in his prime mentally, physically he was a better man than he had been for twenty years and, though he was down and almost out, he was not ready to surrender.

The situation, however, was that he was penniless, nailed to a scale of living which could be maintained only at the expense of his wife. Though she had come to him penniless, what he had given her belonged to her and he could not respect himself and live on it.

He walked the floor nervously, then sat down at his desk and began to figure. The insurance policy had a loan value now of twenty-five thousand dollars. Immediately he scribbled an application for a loan to the insurance company, sealed and stamped the letter.

In a few seconds he had made his decision. When he received the check from the insurance company, he would deposit it to Ruth's bank account and vanish out of her life.

He would go out of the house penniless, plunge into the vortex of the city, and sink or swim as fate decided. He didn't think he would starve to death; people didn't seem to do that any more. He would take any sort of work that offered at whatever wage it paid, live on what he earned, and find out if it was possible for a man of his age to start at the lowest rung of the ladder and work up. It would take years, of course.

Ruth would be distressed at first, but his disappearance would be the best possible thing for her since she was young and beautiful, and would be comparatively well fixed, what with her jewels and the insurance check. In a year or two she would get a divorce and marry some younger and better man.

It was characteristic of Holbrook to denude himself of everything before beginning the adventure. Some men might have felt justified in keeping a

thousand or two of the insurance loan to help themselves get a start, but it would be impossible for him to abandon his young wife without supplying her with every dollar he could provide.

The big man suffered during the next ten days, the more so because Ruth, as if she had a premonition of his determination, was especially kind to him. If he had not seen so clearly how inevitable their life together would deteriorate, he might not have been able to do it.

THE day the check came he indorsed it and mailed it to her bank for deposit. She went shopping that afternoon and during her absence he packed a large suitcase, and penned her a brief note which he laid on her pillow. This is what he wrote:

MY DEAR:

I have committed my last folly by losing what capital remained to us in the stock market. I have borrowed twenty-five thousand dollars on my life insurance and deposited it to your account. Sell your gems and household goods and take the receipts to Gross-smith to invest the proceeds. I think you will be able to live on them in some comfort.

I have often said that a man who cannot support his wife has no right to live with her, and it would be impossible for me to live on your pitiful possessions. I am renouncing all my rights to your love and loyalty. I advise you to get a divorce for desertion and marry some good able man who will not permit his egotism and arrogance to ruin him. Don't worry about me. A man who can't earn his own living isn't fit to live, and, alone I shall get along. I am grateful to you for your love and companionship. I am leaving you because it is best for you. It is unlikely that you will ever see me again. Good-by, my beautiful dear.

PHIN.

A big tear splashed on the blotter as he signed this farewell letter. He sealed it, wrote the address with a firm hand, took it into her bedroom and laid it on her pillow, then, picking up his suitcase, he went out into the world. He

had in his pocket about forty dollars.

New York and London are probably the only cities in which a man can completely lose himself. The world of Phineas Holbrook had consisted of lower Broadway, middle Park Avenue, and the theater district. In the next month he did not encounter a single individual he had ever known in his life, yet he was always within two or three miles of his former haunts.

He had found life very hard during this month. He found a general disinclination to employ men in their forties in small shops, factories and stores. He ran against trade union regulations. Apprenticeships were required for well-paid trades and men of his age could not be apprentices.

He worked for three days as a waiter in a restaurant. He held a job as a mechanic in a garage for nearly a week and was discharged for incompetency. Holbrook knew the theory of a gas engine, but his hands would not obey the instructions of his brain. Mostly he tramped the streets looking for work.

He had assured himself that nobody starved to death any more, but at nine o'clock in the evening, one month to a day after he left his wife and home, he was sitting on a bench in Union Square, one of a long row of disconsolates, a tremendous pang in his stomach and only three pennies in his pocket. He had eaten nothing since breakfast and even if he starved to death he would not apply to a charitable institution, because they asked questions and he might be identified.

The month had beat into him the conviction that he was as incompetent as an unskilled workman as he had been as a business executive. While a man in his forties may be as strong and alert as a youth in his twenties, he lacks the resiliency of that glorious period. He cannot be felled and leap up indefinitely. There comes a time when he prefers to lay where he has fallen. Brains are of no value in the lowest

rank in life and principles are a tremendous handicap.

PHINEAS HOLBROOK sat on the bench and knew that he was finished, down and completely out. He could choose between panhandling and the river.

Beside him on the bench lay a discarded evening paper which he regarded with lack-luster eyes until a headline caught his attention. With trembling hands he grasped the newspaper and stared incredulously at a black streamer on the front page.

"Gustavus Pelham, third richest man in America, dies."

Why, Pelham was only sixty years old and his health had always been excellent. "Heart failure, the paper said."

It seemed impossible that Pelham could be dead. He had everything for which to live. Of course he was sixty and Phineas was only forty-five. It would be fifteen long years before he would be sixty. Fifteen years. In the past fifteen years he had climbed from an unimportant post to be head of Federal.

To be sure, he was penniless, sitting on a bench in Union Square, with a miserable room in a lodging house from which he would be ejected tomorrow, but he was alive and Pelham was dead. Suppose he was broke. Half the men who are millionaires at sixty were poor at forty-five.

He was strong as a horse, he had found that out; nothing the matter with him except that he had laid down for nine months and waited for a big job to come to him. He was a big hulking welcher. Why, in fifteen years he could get to the top again. What the heck—take a chance!

He had been refused a job driving a truck because he would have to join the union. Well, he'd give a false name and a lot of fake biographical data and get on the seat of a truck. The pay was good. With his shoulders he

could handle any burden and with his brains he'd get quick promotion. Pelham dead? Well, he was alive, and it needed a shock like this to show him what a fool he had been.

He stood up, stretched and walked to his furnished room. Dinner was no longer important; do his stomach good to be disciplined. He was still overweight. A good night's sleep and a job in the morning.

Before retiring he stood in front of a full-length mirror arrayed in his B. V. D.'s. He was still heavily built, but the great paunch was gone and the fat cheeks had melted and the jowls had vanished. Why, he only had one extra chin now. If it wasn't for the lines under the eyes it would be Jumbo Holbrook, the Yale Bull, who confronted him. He had not weighed himself recently, but he thought he had lost sixty pounds.

A week later Richard Bliss drove his truck into the repairshop of the Phoenix Trucking Company. It had been limping all day and he diagnosed its trouble as assimilator weakness. He wore overalls and a dirty shirt and a grease-stained golf cap, but his eye was bright and his smile was cheerful.

From president of a great business to driver of a truck was a ghastly tumble, of course, but Phin Holbrook, Richard Bliss on his union card, was having fun. He was the strongest truckman employed by the company and had twice demonstrated that he was a notable fighter. The foreman had his eye on him and he was slated for a steady job, but he didn't know that yet.

CHAPTER IV.

BACK IN THE GAME.

THE mechanic assigned to the repair job on Phin's truck, crawled underneath, to emerge grumbling.

"Those damned Federals wear themselves out in about half the time they

ought to because of the dumb way they are built," said the man.

"The Federal is the best assimilator on the market! It's on about ninety per cent of all trucks," Holbrook said, as hotly as though he were still president of the company.

"Sure. It's the best on the market, but that ain't saying as how it couldn't be better," replied the workman. "Nothin's so good it can't be improved."

"I suppose you could tell the high-priced engineers of Federal how to make a better assimilator," he snorted.

"Sure I could," replied the mechanic, who was a confident, curly-haired youth of twenty-two or three.

"There is a fortune in it for you, kid," laughed the truck driver.

"Go on. You can't tell them big corporations anything. Besides, they'd just swipe the idea."

"I'm curious to know if you have an idea. I doubt it."

"Come over to my bench," invited the boy. "Now look. Assimilators are a mechanical device, subject to friction and wear and tear."

"So's everything."

"Yeah?" The youth rapidly drew a Federal upon a soiled sheet of paper.

"See where this joint clamps. Notice this coil here? Well, they used to think there was no kind of brake 'cept a mechanical brake until somebody thought of a hydraulic brake."

"How in heck could you employ hydraulics to assimilators?" demanded Holbrook.

"Cinch. Look at this, and this." He sketched like a skilled draftsman. "Think what a water cushion would do at this spot. And think how much more of the load it would distribute if you did this."

"What's your name?" demanded Holbrook excitedly.

"Don MacGregor? What's yours?" asked the boy insolently.

"Richard Bliss. Kid, you have something."

"Don't I know it. They wouldn't even look at it down to Federal. I wrote a letter to that big fat stiff Holbrook about a year ago. Never got an answer."

He winced. "For how much will you sell a half interest in your assimilator?"

"Why—five hundred dollars. And glad to get it!"

"Will you give me an option for three days?" Holbrook asked eagerly.

"What's an option?"

Phin explained. "And you don't lose. If I haven't got the five hundred for you in three days, the option is no good. I think I know a fellow who will give me the money. I'll give you a dollar cash. That makes it legal."

"It's no good in three days? All right. Give me the dollar. It'll buy me a good dinner."

Phin rapidly scratched an option on the back of a company billhead. He passed over the dollar, called in two workmen to sign as witnesses and thrust the paper in his pocket. His eyes were gleaming.

IT was no wonder he had been fired by Federal, he was thinking. The inventor of an assimilator which would make Federal obsolete had offered it to him and he had not answered the letter. Why not? He never read his mail. A secretary had thrown the thing into the wastebasket. This kid had adapted hydraulic principles to assimilators. Where were the Federal engineers? When hydraulic braking came in, it had been Holbrook's own business to study it. He was chiefly interested in bridge whist and had no time for study of his business. Faugh! A fat swine was Phineas Holbrook during the last five years.

Well, things would be different now. He was through with trucking. Phin Holbrook, hat in hand, asking for a job, was a complete failure; but Phin Holbrook, half owner of an assimilator that would overturn the industry, was

a dictator. What should he do; sell it to Union Assimilators or start his own company? With this thing in his possession he knew how to interest big money. He had observed one or two minor details of MacGregor's assimilator which were wrong, but he could rectify them in a jiffy. Union Assimilators, with this in their possession, would put Federal out of business in six months. Federal would go down. That hurt. Even though it had cast him out, he hated to overthrow the edifice he had reared; but it was out of the question to dicker with Peabody.

No need of concealment now. He would get hold of Frank Havens—eh?

Holbrook was sitting on a box watching the work on his truck when a harsh voice said: "There he is, mum. That's him."

Phin scowled at the interruption and looked up. A man in a badly fitting brown suit and derby hat was standing in front of him pointing and beside him was Ruth.

She was so beautiful she didn't seem possible, even though her face was white and her mouth was working and tears were streaming from her eyes.

"Ruth," he muttered. "Oh, Ruth, why did you come here?"

She stepped forward and caught his hands as he struggled to his feet.

"Oh, Phin, Phin," she whispered. "I've found you. How could you? How could you? I never dreamed to find you in a pass like this."

"Look out, I'm grease all over," he protested, but her blue broadcloth-clad arms were round his neck and her scarlet lips were pressing against his dirty unshaved cheek.

"Come in the office," he said, aware of a dozen grinning mechanics. "How did you find me?"

"I hired detectives, of course. Frank helped me."

He led her into the office, a small shed vacant for the moment. "Wait outside," she commanded the detective.

"Now," she exclaimed, stamping a

foot. "How dared you leave me like that? How could you?"

"I had to, Ruth. I couldn't let you support me," he protested.

"You big foolish child," she said fondly. "Phin, dear, I never dreamed how fond of you I was until I came home and found that note. I was mean to you. I drove you away. I've been living in luxury and you've been driving a truck."

"And liking it," he grinned.

"Now you're coming home with me. Do you understand?"

"If you found me an hour ago, I wouldn't have been able to do that, dear," he said, "but now—say, have you your checkbook with you? Got five hundred in the bank?"

"Certainly."

"Make out a check for five hundred. Quick."

Obediently she sat at the desk and wrote the check.

"I'll be back in a minute."

He found MacGregor and tendered the surprised youngster the check, having written its purpose on the back.

"Get the company to cash the check for you," he advised. "Young fellow, you and I are partners now."

When he returned he found the foreman facing Ruth rather shyly.

"I'm getting through, boss," Phineas told him. "My wife objects to my being a truck driver."

In the taxi, Phin, having changed to his street clothes, was not such a fear-some object.

Ruth snuggled and sighed contentedly.

"We've had a fearful time finding you."

"I didn't want to be found, and I never hoped you'd try to find me."

IT'S not only me. Frank Havens has been frantic. Pelham's lawyers have been after you. We stalled them by saying you were out of town on business. We must phone Frank at once."

"Pelham's lawyers be hanged," Phin growled. "Some puny legacy. A tip to the waiter."

The door man stared at the rough looking person who entered with Mrs. Holbrook, and stared still more when he recognized him as the once gigantic Phineas Holbrook. He watched them enter the elevator and shook his head in astonishment.

Once in the apartment Ruth rushed to the phone and put in a call for Havens.

"Frank, I've found my husband," Ruth told him excitedly. "He's here, in the apartment. He wants to talk to you, Phin."

"Hello, Frank," said the big man airily. "How are you getting along with your directors?"

"Terribly. Kilkenny cats. Listen, chief, Pelham's lawyers want to see you."

"I'm not interested in Pelham's lawyers. If he left me a legacy I won't touch it."

"I tell you they are all worked up. It's something damned important. They have been camping on my trail. I'll make an appointment for you at their office."

"I should say not. Tell them I'll be at home at eleven to-morrow morning. If they want me they can come after me. Thanks, old man." He hung up.

"Darling, you won't go away again," pleaded Ruth, her arms about his neck.

He grinned. "If I met you three hours ago, I'd have run off again, but now I'm home for good. Ruth, I've got Federal. I have it in the hollow of my hand."

This from a truck driver! But, if Ruth saw the incongruity of it, she was too full of joy and too tactful to mention it.

Phelps Broderick, head of the firm of Broderick and Arundal, who had handled the personal affairs of Pelham for a generation, was announced on the stroke of eleven. The lawyer was a

starchy man of fifty with a gray Vandyke beard who was attired in gray English tweeds and carried a light cane. Holbrook had encountered him very occasionally in the past three or four years, and he laughed with understanding when Mr. Broderick, who entered briskly, stopped and stared.

"I swear I should not have known you, Mr. Holbrook. You look very much younger."

"I dropped sixty pounds when I shook Federal from my shoulders. Sit down, Mr. Broderick. What can I do for Pelham's lawyers?"

Mr. Broderick, seating himself, continued his inspection of his host. "I congratulate you, sir. I trust the business which kept you out of town has been concluded successfully."

"I put it over," Phineas said curtly.

"Doubtless you wish to know the disposition of the affairs of Mr. Pelham."

Phineas put his thumbs in his vest and crossed his legs importantly. He was feverish to know. "I confess to some slight natural curiosity. May I offer you a drink?"

"Too early, thanks. Your absence has embarrassed us greatly."

HOLBROOK looked surprised. "In view of the fact that I was ejected from Federal after building it into a great business enterprise, I considered that my movements could not interest Pelham. I don't mind telling you that I have been occupied with a type of assimilator which will make the Federal an antique."

"Dear, dear. It's fortunate that I have found you. Mr. Pelham, as it happens, fearing that his children would make ducks and drakes of his great fortune, has placed the conduct of his industrial corporations in the hands of a board of trustees. The board will consist of three members: John Endicott, president of the Bristow Bank; myself; and one other, who will be the chairman. The chairman will

be paid two hundred thousand a year."

Holbrook made a wry face.

"Mr. Peabody is to be congratulated," he said.

"Peabody? In his will, Mr. Pelham named you for the post, Mr. Holbrook."

If this Phineas had been the man who was fired by Federal, he would have had a stroke.

"It's impossible," he muttered. "Pelham could have no such intention. How old is that will?"

"It was drawn three years ago."

Holbrook's collar was strangling him. He fiddled with his necktie.

"You'll find it out of date," he said bitterly. "He must have made a new will."

"No," replied the attorney. "He may have intended to change his will because of your resignation from the service, but he didn't do so. Few men expect to die at sixty. I have authority to offer you the post, sir. Do you accept?"

The man who had been driving a truck laughed harshly.

"Pelham dead is wiser than Pelham living, Mr. Broderick. I have purchased a half interest in a hydraulic assimilator and had intended organizing a company to put it on the market. I assure you that it would have driven Federal out of business and, were Pelham living, I should be delighted to have that happen. But I made Federal and I don't want to wreck it. If my colleagues on the board of trustees agree with me to purchase the invention at a fair price, I shall consent to serve."

Mr. Broderick beamed. "My dear sir, neither I nor Mr. Endicott will venture to interfere with your judgment in technical matters. If this invention seems to you important to Federal, then Federal must have it. Our minds will be greatly relieved by your acceptance. While I am aware you had a difference with Mr. Pelham, he himself has often told me that you were entirely responsible for the great success of that cor-

poration and for the progress of the allied companies. We have lost a week in organizing because of your absence and we should have our first board meeting at once. Where do you suggest we hold it?"

The eyes of the big man sparkled. "I am sure that Mr. Peabody will be delighted to place the president's office at Federal at our disposal. Three o'clock, this afternoon?"

"That will be convenient for Endicott and myself."

"And I think I can get Frank Havens away from Excell Motors. I wish to place him at the head of Federal. My very first act, and my acceptance of this position depends upon it, is to fire Luke Peabody."

With a gesture of indifference Mr.

Broderick threw overboard Peabody, schemer and politician.

"For several months things have not been well at Federal. You will do what is best for the organization, Mr. Holbrook. *Au revoir.*"

Left alone, Phineas Holbrook gravely pinched the back of his left hand with the thumb and forefinger of his right, and smiled a very broad smile. The door to an inner room opened and Ruth appeared, also smiling broadly.

"You heard?" he demanded. "Dictator of all the Pelham industries. Two hundred thousand a year. I wonder if that house on Long Island is still on the market."

"Let it stay there," replied Ruth, coming close to him. "Oh, Phin, let's save *this* money."

THE END.

U U U

The Old Santa Fé Mill

JUST outside Kansas City, in the very shadows of its towering skyscrapers, stands a historical relic of pioneer days that has been left virtually untouched by encroaching civilization. This is the old Santa Fe mill, where early travelers over the Santa Fe Trail secured flour. The picturesque mill stands to-day, a landmark, almost as it was built a century ago. It was erected in 1832, on the banks of Indian Creek. Since that time it has changed hands only once.

In the year 1850 the mill was purchased by Anthony B. Watts, a member of the famous Lewis and Clark expedition. Anthony Watts married a great-granddaughter of Daniel Boone. Upon the death of Anthony Watts, the mill went to the present owner, his son, Stubbins Watts.

No nails were used in the construction of the mill, and the hinges on the doors were made from wooden pegs, inserted in the rough-hewn timbers. The original grinding drums were made from rudely notched stones, and the gears of wood. Indian Creek still furnishes the power that turns the drums, but now the power is transmitted through a modern Leffel water turbine to the new iron gears.

In early days Indians brought their corn here to be ground, and during the Civil War, Anthony Watts ground flour and meal for both soldiers and civilians. Old emigrants over the Santa Fe Trail stopped here for their little paper sacks of flour. The mill grinds only meal now: the new roller mills have made the grinding of flour unprofitable. But the relic still stands amid the modern rush and hurry—a vivid reminder of another day.

B. W. Gardner.



Commanding the opening stood the Afghan wife of Corporal Combes

Swords Are Out!

Flying to the rescue of the Manchu princess and his care-free colored troops, Captain John Norcross reaches the mountains of western China just in time

By W. WIRT

Author of "War Lord of Many Swordsmen," "Stopping 'Em with Lead," etc.

LEADING UP TO THIS INSTALLMENT

WHEN John Norcross, secret agent and adventurer, had fought his way across western China and set the Manchu princess, Ch'nyaun and her consort, T'ang Wang, in power, in their city of Ningyuan, most of his colored troops, who had fought under him in the regular army and loved fighting for its own sake, wanted to stay in the mountain country. So there he left them, under the command of Deacon Yancey.

They ambush and wipe out a Cosack *sotnia* of more than a hundred men; but they are deceived by the praise of the few survivors, who invite them to feast with other brave Cosack fighters. No ambush is set, but

the feasting is all part of a deep-laid plan of revenge, framed up by the Cosack *hetman*, Colonel Lukashka, and Ch'iu, War Lord of Taiyaun and a secret enemy of Ch'nyaun. They plan ultimately to trap and disperse the negro fighters, and then take Ningyuan. Both Lukashka and Ch'iu, however, distrust each other and plan to outwit the other in the division of the spoils.

Ch'iu has another reason for hating Ch'nyaun, for his captive, the Lady Anna Guilai, has escaped from his power and taken refuge in Ningyuan. Anna, descendant of Magyar princes and Polish nobles, had come down from Siberia to take refuge with Ning-

This story began in the Argosy-Allstory Weekly for May 4.

yuan nobles, of the House of Chou, which owed her late father a debt of gratitude.

The deception of the unsuspecting, child-like negro fighters has reached such a point that T'ang Wang, followed by murderous agents of Ch'iu, hurries to New York to beg the return of Norcross. The gallant adventurer rescues T'ang Wang from the attack of Ch'iu's men, and then summons the remaining leaders of his troops—"Yaller" Coudray, "Delicate" Moss, and the rest. With airplanes and weapons furnished by his wealthy patron, Landess—for whom he first went to western China—Norcross and his men start with T'ang Wang, to rescue Ch'ienyaun from the danger that menaces her city as soon as spring opens the mountain passes.

CHAPTER VI.

THE RETURN OF CAPTAIN NORCROSS.

THE last of three planes made a perfect three-point landing in a little valley, a day's march from the city of Ningyuan. After the English aviators, who had flown them up from Bombay, had shaken hands with Norcross and taken off on their homeward flight, Norcross stood for a moment and looked at the men he had brought with him: First Sergeant Yaller Coudray, Sergeant Norton, Corporals Delicate Moss and Jeff Talliferro, Private Slewfoot, whose right name had been lost years ago, and Privates Squint-eye Mears and Alabam Johnston.

T'ang Wang stood beside him. The voyage across the Pacific had knit his shoulder, and the skill with which the jagged edges had been brought together had made it once more as good as ever.

"All right, you birds," said Norcross. "We will make a forced march to-night and get into Ningyuan by morning."

"Yes, suh, capt'n," answered First Sergeant Coudray, hitching around in front the Colt .45 that hung from his belt. "Us gits dare."

They had resurrected their uniforms of khaki, and as Coudray spoke, the sun glinted from the yellow stripes of a first sergeant on his sleeve: "Corporal Talliferro and Private Squint-eye, git ahead as scouts. Corporal Moss wid Private Johnston, you takes de reah guard. Sergeant Norton an' Private Slewfoot, you remains wid de party. Ah makes de rounds mahself."

There was a little snow on the hunting path and little more on the sides of the mountain—not as much as farther in the range where it covered the passes leading to the eastern slope. But even there, there was not nearly as much as T'ang Wang had expected. Here on the eastern side the path that wound through the cañons was more or less protected by higher hills on either side.

T'ang Wang walked with Norcross. "When we arrive, O elder brother, will you keep the fact a secret, so that we may plan a surprise?"

"I doubt if it would be possible, T'ang Wang. Ch'iu's spies must be in the city. I think the best thing to do is to go in openly. It may cause them to readjust their plans, and it will also give us time to do a little planning ourselves. First thing is to get in."

It was just breaking dawn and they were near the final pass leading to Ningyuan when Sergeant Coudray slid down a little rocky ledge about a hundred feet ahead and waited for them to come up.

"If de capt'n please," he said, as he saluted, "dere is a small party camped up in de cañon to de right, 'bout half a mile ahaid. Six men wid pack horses. Two tents. Wid dem is fo' odder men dat from where us watched looked like some of de boys. Dey has got 'em fo' or five kegs standing round an' is drinkin' heavy. Dere is a woman dancin' by de camp fire. One of dem

hoochy-mah-cooch dancers. Us has dem under obse'vation from de timbah."

"All right, sergeant, we will go over and take a look at them. I am going to tell you now why we have come back. You can tell Corporal Moss and the rest of the party later. After we left Ningyuan some of the men went on a hunting party. They first fought and then made friends with some Cossacks, who are cavalry, like we used to be. The leader of the Cossacks and the man who got control of the city of Taiyaun, where you birds rescued me, have framed up to get the boys scattered out in small parties, like the one you just reported on, then when the time comes, mop up on them and take Ningyuan, and probably kill the Princess Ch'nyaun."

"Oh, mah goodness!" said Yaller Coudray, "an' does dem idjuts fall fo' a play like dat? Does Ah git mah mitts on dat Deacon Yancey, Ah'll—"

"I'll do the talking for a few minutes. What I want to tell you is this. I know there isn't a man in the outfit that wouldn't die in defense of the Princess Ch'nyaun, and I want to impress on you men that they are not to get the idea in any way that we think different, because we don't. Those boys have acted like a lot of damn fools, that's all, and they need some instructions on the subject of accepting invitations. When we arrive in Ningyuan, sergeant, I am going to let you do the first straightening out. You can tell them just what they were leading into; then I'll attend to it. Is that plain to you?"

"Yes, suh, capt'n," answered First Sergeant Coudray, saluting. "Dat's plain. Capt'n, please, suh, can Ah lick fo' or five of dem noncoms dat oughta have seen whereat dey was goin'?"

"Lick all you darn please," answered Norcross with a grin, "only no gun or steel fussin'."

"No, suh, capt'n, dey won't be."

"All right. We'll go up and see who is giving this party. How close can we get to them, sergeant, before they see us?"

"If de capt'n pleases, us can Injun up on dem from de odder side of de cañon, den down in de timbah and in back of de pack horses right smack on top of dem."

"Call in your rear guard and bring the two forward men back to us."

The camp where the party was in progress was in a sheltered little cañon where there was very little snow on the ground. There were two tents, and behind them, several horses on a picket line.

In front of the tents a big fire blazed and around it danced four men, all but one of them Cossacks. The other was a lean colored man, who would gravely watch the Cossacks spring into the air and throw their legs out, then he would try to do likewise, much to the enjoyment of three other colored men who were sitting with three Cossacks close to an open keg, into which they were dipping every few minutes.

A young woman, well built and graceful, was dancing by herself a little off to one side; not the "hoochy-mah-cooch" that Yaller Coudray called it, but a swaying, graceful dance in which her feet in high-topped fur boots hardly moved. She was an Afghan and her face was a comely one, almost as dark in color as those of the negroes.

There was no attempt at any guard, they all seemed to be perfectly at home. Every one in the party was more than a little drunk, the woman included, except an older Cossack who sat with the colored men. He was the one who had been at the World's Fair, and was acting as interpreter. The camp rang with laughter and gay shouts.

"Dat's de boy, Skinnay!"

"Does you jump highah, you touches de sky!"

"Give 'em de Mobile crawl!"

"One mo' jump and you puts youah haid in de lick!"

"Ain't dat gal graceful?"

"Dog-gone! How many is dey, Buck? Ah sees two gals and—"

Norcross stepped from behind the tents. About five feet in the rear came T'ang Wang, then a little back of him on either side came Sergeants Yaller Coudray and Norton. Corporals Moss and Talliferro, Privates Slewfoot, Squint-eye Mears, and Alabam Johnston.

ONE of the dancing Cossacks was nearest to Norcross and saw him.

He stopped spinning around, and as his sword whirled from its scabbard he shouted: "Ho! An attack! Kill! Slash! Up, brothers! Strike!" And he sprang to within cutting distance of Norcross, his sword raised.

Norcross's right hand flashed down and his Colt .45 seemed to detonate before it left the holster. The Cossack's saber fell from his hand, which was paralyzed by the heavy, soft-nosed lead bullet that had torn through his wrist. He brought his arm down and seized his wrist above the wound with his left hand. As he shouted and drew, the other dancing Cossacks drew also and the ones sitting down with the colored men, sprang to their feet, drawing also. But they froze, all of them, just as they crouched to hurl themselves forward. There were five of them, not counting the man with the bullet hole in his wrist, who was now sitting down packing the hole in his forearm with snow, paying no attention to anything else. Directly on them were eight Colt muzzles. T'ang Wang made no attempt to draw his Colt, but stood quietly, a little smile on his face.

The Cossacks, fighting men all, knew that they were confronted with fighting men who would pull trigger at the slightest move, and that their swords were useless to guard against the death that would come belching out of the little round holes that pointed so steadily at their hearts or foreheads.

The four colored men were on their

feet also, their eyes almost popping out of their heads. The one that had been talking about seeing two girls where there only should have been one, was rubbing his eyes. The one who had been dancing had danced off some of the heady brandy and was not quite as drunk as the rest, and he stood with his mouth open, absolutely still, his eyes on Norcross. One of the men by the keg was saying over and over again, in positive tones: "Yes, suh, Ah got to quit drinkin' dis stuff—Ah got to quit drinkin' dis stuff."

Norcross looked at the Cossacks. "Drop your swords and put your hands above your heads!" He did not know whether they would understand the language, but he knew they would understand the gesture that accompanied it. The sergeant of Cossacks who spoke English promptly let go his sword and raised his hands. As he did he shouted an order, and the rest followed suit.

"Sergeant Coudray, see if these men have any more weapons, then tie their hands behind their backs. Take Corporal Moss with you. We will kill any man who moves unless ordered."

The Cossack spoke again to his men, and they submitted to the none too gentle search by Yaller Coudray; Corporal Moss, who was as big as any two of them, stood alongside in case of accident.

They were searched, their arms brought behind them, tied with their own belts. All this time Norcross had absolutely ignored the four colored men. The Afghan woman had ceased to dance and had walked calmly over almost to Norcross's side. She stood there, one hand on her hip, a smile on her pretty dark face, and watched, as if at an amusing puppet show.

"If de capt'n pleases," finally announced Sergeant Coudray, saluting, "de prisoners is searched fo' weapons an' secured."

"Very good, sergeant. Fall those other men in."

Sergeant Coudray turned and his cold glance took in the three colored men standing by the keg and the one out where the dance had been going on. He looked at them as if they were some not very pleasing specimens of a new monkey tribe.

"Fall in," he rasped. "Ten feet in front of me. Nevah mind any right of de line, you bums what has disgraced de outfit! Git ovah heah an—"

"Steady," drawled Norcross. "That will do, sergeant."

As the four men formed as straight a line as possible, their black faces woe-begone, their eyes still wide, Sergeant Coudray snarled: "Ten-shun!"

They came to it, dizzy and utterly astonished though they were. Their old training in the regulars came to their assistance and their bodies straightened and their chins came up. Sergeant Coudray took two steps toward them, did a perfect about face, saluted and said: "Suh, de troop is formed."

"Very good, sergeant, take your post," answered Norcross, returning the salute.

THE Cossacks, the woman, the men behind Norcross and the men in line stood there motionless while Norcross looked at his men. He started at their feet and he slowly looked up each man until his eyes had reached and held the pleading ones of the men who had served under him in the regulars and in France and who had been with him on his expedition into China, because they loved him.

He stepped in close to the line and halted. "Buck Foster, Skinnay Martin, the Mobile Kid, and Happy Combes, your shoes are unpolished, your uniforms are dirty, your buttons are dull and—" He stepped in close to the Mobile Kid and touched a grease spot on the tunic with the tip of his finger. "Is that grease? On you, one of the men I taught how to keep himself clean?" Then he stepped back.

"All right, sergeant, dismiss these men. Some mistake here, I thought they were ex-regulars. These are men who got hold of a uniform somewhere and don't know how to wear it."

Sergeant Coudray came up to within a foot of the line. "Dismiss!" he snarled.

The men relaxed and the Mobile Kid took a step forward toward Norcross. "Capt'n, please, suh," he pleaded, "us ain't done nothin'—'cept to git drunk an' go huntin'—an'—an' git us some wives. Capt'n, please, suh, us is youah men, same as evah. Mah uniform Ah gits—"

"What you get," interrupted Norcross, "is twenty million years K. P., and then four million more after that. Get back in line. I see a man who has a corporal's stripes. One pace forward, Corporal Combes. What is the meaning of an exhibition like this?"

"Please, suh," answered Corporal Combes, stepping forward and saluting. "Us meets dese men and us fights 'em fust an' den us gits friendly. Us been huntin' and drinkin' wid dem since."

"I see. How many more of you are on parties like this?"

"Dese is all, if de capt'n pleases. Rest wouldn't come out in de cold. Us got a furlough from de princess an'—"

"Yeah? Well, if that's the case, I don't want to interfere with your party. You are the Princess Ch'nyaun's men, not mine."

"No, suh, capt'n," protested the Mobile Kid. "Us is youah men."

"Us goes wid you, please, suh," pleaded Skinnay Martin.

"Capt'n, us didn't know us was off de reservation," begged Corporal Combes. "Please, suh, does you 'member de time down in Sonora dat I—"

"That will do. Yes, I remember. And because I remember when you were a regular and not what Sergeant Coudray called you—a drunken bum—I'll take you back with me to Ning-

yuan. Sergeant Coudray, we'll take these prisoners with us. These men may fall in with the rest of the party. Break down those tents and load the pack train. This woman, who is she?" to Corporal Combes.

"Capt'n, please, suh, she's mah wife an'—"

"All right, she may accompany the party. You birds better get sobered up right quick. Get over there and straighten yourselves up before I start to work on you personally."

Buck Foster looked at the bound Cossacks and then at Norcross. He was from Kentucky, where the laws of hospitality are rigid from the "big house" to the lowest cabin. He felt that something was wrong and he knew that the captain would adjust matters once it was called to his attention. He came back to attention and saluted.

"All right, Buck, what is it?" Norcross demanded.

"Please, suh, capt'n. Dese Cossacks is ouah guests. Dat is—us invited dem heah. Does you take 'em in tied up an' as prisonahs—it ain't— Like de old judge say, at de big house on de Dinwiddie plantation whereat I was born: 'To de guest in ouah house.' Ah reckons dat dey is ouah guests, please, suh!"

Norcross looked at the silent line of Cossacks, then at the big colored man who stood watching him. "That's right," he drawled. "'To the guest in our house.' I didn't know they were your guests, Buck. That being the case: Sergeant Coudray, you will untie these gentlemen and restore to them their arms. You men can come back to Ningyuan when you get through entertaining your guests."

"Please, suh, capt'n, us comes wid you," said Corporal Combes hurriedly.

"Then see that your guests are properly speeded on their way, and catch up with the party as soon as possible. You may bring your wife with you, corporal, if you wish. All right, sergeant, we will get started."

4 A

The four colored men and the Afghan woman caught up with them before they had done two miles.

"Us sent dem home, capt'n," announced Corporal Combes, with a very snappy salute. "Us can't be foolin' wid no Cossacks, no, suh."

AT dawn the little party reached the watercourse that led into the rear of Ningyuan.

The city was built in the crater of an extinct volcano which had erupted thousands of years ago and taken all the mountain with it except the shells of the crater walls. On one side the wall merged with the impassable peaks of the Chang T'shu mountain. In the rear the mountains came almost up to the wall, but there were cañons and valleys and old watercourses that could be followed until the city was reached.

Once there, there was no way to climb the wall, and entrance must be had through the bed of the dried-up waterways. In front, looking toward the city of Taiyaun, thirty miles away across a small range of mountains, the ground sloped down to hills that made a horseshoe bend about a mile in width, then out in a valley that was five miles long by about three wide. Then the hills closed in again.

To get into the city, an enemy would have to make a frontal attack on the side of a mountain still many feet thick and over a thousand feet high. On the right the attackers would find themselves on the crater's rim, with only narrow paths leading down in the city.

The interior of the crater was about two miles in circumference, and the city held two hundred thousand people. The sides of the mountain, made fertile by the years of careful cultivation and dirt brought in from the valleys, were highly cultivated, and the numerous springs gave an abundance of water. Ch'enyau's people were artisans, and their work was eagerly traded for. The mountains within a circle of ten

miles were rich in gold and semi-precious stones, and over them Ch'nyaun held sway, as she did the salt mines and the lower valleys.

The boundary line ran about fifteen miles toward the city of Taiyaun in that direction; to the rear it ran as far as any one dared to go.

The gates of the city in front were the only entrance that could be used unless one came up to the city from the rear, which meant a wide swing through hostile country. From the front it looked as if some wide gates led into a tunnel in a mountain.

There were very few houses of wood; the vast majority were stone, built solidly. Some had small slits for windows, others were without any windows, but all boasted open courts inside and flat roofs where most of the inhabitants' lives were spent.

The palaces of the nobles were along the sides of a hill that was practically in the middle of the crater, and the palace of Ch'nyaun was at its summit. It would be a hard city to take by direct assault. Once inside the gates the streets turned and twisted so that it made each street, even each house, like a new city that must be stormed. From the main front gates the street ran straight back for a hundred yards, then bent at a full right angle.

The old watercourses were about fifteen feet wide. There were four of them converging into one which widened to fifty feet before it entered the crater at the mountain wall. In olden days these had been branches of a river that joined there and went underground. What had happened at the time of the volcano's eruption was problematical. It may have been that the stream became dammed up somewhere below and the back water flowed into the mountain, causing the explosion. Whatever it was, there was no more water flowing down them.

The only danger of attack had been from the savages of the country at the rear, who allowed no one to pass

through their country until Norcross and his men had shot their way through and destroyed them. All four watercourses were barred by heavy iron gates, and where they converged there was a heavier gate reaching from the ground to the roof of what had now become a tunnel into the city.

Since Norcross had destroyed the savages, the rear country was being rapidly settled by people from the city on little farms.

The gates rose silently on well-greased chains as T'ang Wang led the silent little party through. The guards were all Chinese, who bowed low to T'ang Wang—and bowed again as they recognized Norcross. When the last gate was passed and they stood in the city Norcross turned to Sergeant Coudray:

"You will tell the men that I am here and will inspect all equipment and themselves at one o'clock this afternoon. Until that time I don't want to see any of them. Have them in the star formation in front of the palace. All men, equipment, mules, except the ammunition that was received after I left."

"Yes, suh," answered Sergeant Coudray, saluting. "Us will all be present."

Norcross stood with T'ang Wang for a moment, watching them file down one of the streets; then as they neared the palace he grinned. "I would give a dollar to be there and hear what Yaller has to say to them. But I thought it best to let him explain in his own language—then I'll salve the wounds."

CHAPTER VII.

"SNAP INTO IT!"

CH'ENYAUN sat with Norcross and T'ang Wang in one of the smaller audience rooms of the palace. She had put her arms around her honorable elder brother, and her

proud little head for a moment had lain against his breast when T'ang Wang had brought him to her.

She had told them of the reports of her spies sent north to the Cossack encampment and to Taiyaun. "They could learn nothing," she finished, "except that Ch'iu drills his men continually and has brought in from the south many guns."

"What kind of guns, Ch'anyaun?" asked Norcross.

"Like yours, and big ones also. Bigger than the four you have, O Lord John."

"And at the Cossack encampment?"

"There my men could learn nothing. The dog that calls himself a *hetman* caught two of them and gave them the death of the sharp stake—for which, when I take him, I will give him in payment the death of a thousand cuts," she added coldly.

"Then there has been no change since T'ang Wang left?"

"None, except that your men have taken wives that the Cossacks brought them. They have built what they call a hunting lodge over on the other side of the Thian Shan range of hills, and go there as often as possible. Their wives are there. I did not want them here in Ningyuan, knowing they may be spies of the Cossacks."

"You acted wisely, O War Lord of many swordsmen! This afternoon I hold an inspection for all men and equipment—also hold a little reception afterward for those no-count scoundrels!"

"John, is it in your mind that we will not wait—for those dogs to attack us?" asked Ch'anyaun, her eyes two black flames of warlike spirit. She would have fought bravely by herself or with T'ang Wang, but now that Norcross was with them once more there was not the shadow of a doubt in her loyal little heart but that it was simply a question of how to proceed.

"Well, suh," answered Norcross,

with a smile, "I reckon we better look the situation over right carefully first. There was a famous warrior once, Ch'anyaun, who many times was attacked by three or four kings and war lords. He would turn and rend one, then would fall on another, never letting them combine. It may be that we can do the same. T'ang Wang, is the government in Peking strong enough to interfere in a local fight up here?"

"No. They have enough to do to remain in control where they are. The Army of the South is victorious at the moment, that is all. Even in the days of the Emperor there was no interference between the fights of war lords of these provinces, unless one or the other had influence enough to have troops sent up to help him."

"Well, I think that Mr. Landess's agents can prevent anything like that."

"Also, the brother of my mother is a member of the Tu Ch'a Yuen," added T'ang Wang grimly.

"Which is?" asked Norcross.

"The highest censorate—I cannot translate it exactly. It is like the cabinet, Lord John. All matters for the ruler to pass on used to come through them. Even now in the days of the republic they still wield a powerful influence."

"Yeah? Well, that leaves Mr. Ch'iu to fight his own battles then. I wonder just how much authority the Soviet has over these Cossacks? Not very much, I reckon. It's a long way from the Kirghiz Steppe to Leningrad."

"I do not think they have more than a paper control. I learned that this colonel or *hetman* was ordered to withdraw his troops from the Don and was sent to the Kirghiz to get him out of the way."

"That being the case, if we can decoy him over into Chinese territory with his men, and trick them into starting the attack, the Soviet would promptly disown him."

"Yes, John. Otherwise it would be an attack on all China, and that is

what the Soviet dread more than anything else—that some hothead will do something which will force them to withdraw all their agents before they are ready to start making China as they are.”

“I see,” drawled Norcross. “Then we’ll try to give this Cossack who impales people, and this new War Lord of Taiyaun, a touch of high life.”

“Touch of—high life? What does that mean, John?” questioned Ch’nyaun, whose English, taught her by T’ang Wang was very good, but not proof against slang.

“That means we will make life interesting for them from now on,” explained Norcross, smiling at the little Manchu princess.

“I must remember that. High life, yes.” The dainty head nodded gravely. “O elder brother, now that you are here, we will give these curs a large touch of high life.”

BOTH Norcross and T’ang Wang laughed. “What we will do first—” began Norcross, and then stopped. Coming through the suite of rooms that led into theirs was the Lady Anna Guilai, followed by several maidens and a bodyguard of swordsmen with the insignia of the House of Chou on their tunics.

She was not clothed in white cotton now, this Magyar girl of royal blood. Her silken robes blazed with jewels and her little feet were in satin shoes with the fur of the ermine around the high tops. The side combs in her bronze hair glittered with diamonds, and on her dainty hands and wrists were jewels that almost equaled those of Ch’nyaun. The Manchu House of Chou was paying its debt of honor.

As T’ang Wang and Norcross rose at the girl’s approach, Ch’nyaun informed them: “This is the maiden I told you about. I sent for her to come and meet you. I have no sister, and I want her to be here with me always.

She is quiet and calm, like you, O elder brother. I love her in the place of the sister I have not.”

Norcross looked at the graceful, slim Magyar girl who now was within twenty feet of them, and said softly: “I reckon it wouldn’t be hard to love her.”

Ch’nyaun heard him, and her face became wreathed in smiles. To herself she murmured: “I had hoped you would, Lord, John.”

The Lady Anna bowed to Ch’nyaun, a smile on her perfect lips. “You sent for me, O princess?” she asked in Chinese.

“Yes,” answered Ch’nyaun, rising also, which was something she would do for very few people. “Lady Anna, you already know the Manchu noble T’ang Wang, the lord of my heart; and I present to you the Lord John Norcross, a War Lord of America, which lies far away. John, this is the Magyar Lady Anna Guilai.”

T’ang Wang and Norcross bowed low, and the Lady Anna smiled at them both, but her eyes were looking at the lean face of Norcross.

“I am honored,” she said in her low and lovely voice. “The Princess Ch’nyaun has told me much about the Lord Norcross. I saw you in Taiyaun one day,” she added, speaking directly to Norcross.

She was speaking in Chinese, and Norcross didn’t understand a word of it. He knew several short phrases and terms that Ch’nyaun had taught him, but that was all. The Lady Anna saw the puzzled look come into his eyes and turned to Ch’nyaun with a graceful little gesture of despair. “The Lord John does not speak Chinese. Does he speak Russian or the hill dialects?”

Ch’nyaun translated for Norcross, who smiled and shook his head.

“I am afraid I don’t. I can manage a little Spanish and German if it is spoken right slow—and my French is something awful, I’m afraid.”

The girl caught the word "French," and her face lighted up as she switched to that tongue. "But I can speak French! My father taught me, also an old French officer that lived with us for a long time until he died. So, *monsieur*, we have found a language."

"If you will speak very slowly, *mademoiselle*," suggested Norcross in halting French. "My French is of the army and camps."

"T'ang Wang," said Ch'anyaun promptly, "we will hold a review of our men also this afternoon, as the Lord John does. See that commands are given. Will you remain here with the Lord John, Lady Anna, until we return?"

"I will be very glad to stay here with the Lord John," answered the girl, with a smile. "Perhaps he will teach me how to speak English." Then she translated what she had said into French.

"I'll be very glad to," answered Norcross, with a smile, "but I won't guarantee the purity of it."

SERGEANT YALLER COUDRAY stepped into the big assembly room of the men's quarters, Sergeant Norton beside him. Behind him formed a silent line composed of Corporal Delicate Moss and Jeff Talliferro, Privates Slewfoot, Squint-eye Mears and Alabam Johnston. Behind them there grouped the four men who had been drinking with the Cosacks.

The weather was clear but cold, and all of the men were there, playing cards, smoking, doing a little mending, or loafing on the long, low couches that lined the walls. Several stoves, made of iron or copper, held great beds of red coals, and the room was warm.

As the door opened some one felt the draft, and, without looking up, yelled:

"Shut dat do'! Was you raised in a barn?"

"No!" snapped Yaller Coudray. "Ah was raised in de Army, where reg'lars, left by demselves fo' a day or two, keeps on bein' reg'lars—not suck-ahs dat gets sucked in by the fust outfit dat see 'em."

Long before he had finished, men were jumping up from all over the room. The card players pushed their chairs back, the men on the couches rolled off on their feet. Some one called "Ten-shun!"

"Don't come to no ten-shun fo' me," Yaller snarled, his lips curled back to show his even, white teeth. "You ain't no sogers. You is a lot of barrel-house bums—'at's what yo'-all is—a lot of barrel-house bums and suckahs."

From the room came a medley of voices: "Mah Gawd, is Ah seein' things?"

"Doggone! Yaller Coudray and Delicate Moss and Norton!"

"Hot damn! Is dat you, Slew-foot?"

"Squint-eye! Here I is!"

"Lawdy, what's comin' off?"

"You, Jeff! Come 'ere, boy!"

One man in the center bellowed: "Dog mah cats! De capt'n come back!"

"Hey, is de capt'n heah, Yaller?"

Then the men in the room all sensed there was something the matter. Neither Yaller nor any of the rest made any movement to come forward, and after Yaller's first speech nothing had been said by any of the newcomers.

Sergeant Coudray stood there, one hundred and eighty pounds of living black steel, his lips still curled into a snarl, his black eyes narrowed to slits. He was like a lithe, slim panther, this Yaller Coudray, and he firmly believed that the men confronting him had disgraced him, their first sergeant. It had been on his recommendation that T'ang Wang had made Deacon Yancey first sergeant.

The noise in the room quieted down, and the men, one hundred and twenty

of them, stood staring at Yaller for a minute. Then Sergeant Yancey walked up to within five feet of him, the men converging behind him as close as possible.

"What's the mattah, Yaller?" Yancey demanded.

"Ah tells you what is de mattah," Yaller said sneeringly, "but you apes is too close to us reg'lars. Ah smells you from heah. Form in two lines, does you remembah dat much. Nevah min' no eyes right or eyes left. Git into de best line you can, bein' what you is. Keep in de line, you birds what wears de stripes of noncommissioned officers. You ain't no noncoms—you ain't nothin'!"

As the men formed in two lines that reached across the room from wall to wall, Yaller and the rest behind him heard:

"Gawd, man, what is us done? Ain't done nothin'! Wish de capt'n was heah! Ain't dat boy talkin' rough!"

Then some one said, plain enough for Yaller to hear it distinctly: "Ah'll smack dat nigger down in about a minute!"

"**W**HO said dat?" Yaller demanded.

"I said hit," and a big, heavy-set colored man pushed through the first line. "I said hit. Us ain't done nothin', an' along you come an' jumps all over us. How come, Yaller?"

"Stand to one side a minute, boy," answered Yaller. "Ah'll tend to you in youah turn. Dere is some of dese monkey-faces ahaid of you. Now, Ah'm going to tell you how come, an' what Ah says goes for all of you."

Here Yaller's language became unprintable. He gave them all he had ever learned on the border, in the Army, in France, in civil life, and way stations; and when he finished he drew a long breath and began again. "So now dat you knows what you looks

like to reg'lars, I'll tell you how come. You stays heah to protect de princess. De last words de capt'n say is 'Take care of de princess fo' me.' Dat's right, ain't it? Never min' no answerin'. Plenty time fo' dat. Den, when us goes home, leavin' you heah, wid ouah reps in yo' hands, what does you do? What does you do?"

The double line stirred uneasily. They hadn't liked at all Yaller's previous detailed statements of their personal ancestry and appearance, and now they were going to be accused of doing something that not one of them had the slightest idea they had done.

"Stan' fast! Ah ain't fairly started yet. What does you do, you men who used to be reg'lars?" Yaller had heard Norcross use that phrase, and it had appealed to him, and he had made a mental note of it for his own use. "You scum of creation, you lets a bunch of ridahs suck you along wid lickin' an' women—huntin' here an' huntin' dere—an' de man what is de king of dat city whereat us rescues de capt'n, you lets him come an' make friends."

"Why does dey give you lickin' an' women? Is it because dey loves de monkey-faces of you chatterin' apes? Is dat why de king of dat city comes out an' meets wid you an' lickin' you up? Wid you-uns? How come white or yaller mixin' in wid colored men? How come, dat's what you wants to know, is it? Ah tells you so dat you lousy militia can understan'." That was the most deadly insult of all, that militia thing.

"Get dis: Ah ain't got time to be monkeyin' 'round wid no tin sogers. Us reg'lars got some work to do. Heah it is, in little words so dat yo' peanut brains will understan'. De Cosacks frame wid de Chink ovah yonder dat dey gwine make friends wid you; den de Chink he comes in an' makes friends wid you also. Dat's what dey done, ain't it? Den de huntin' an' de lickin' an' de women parties git goin'—

an' you gits scattered all out in different places.

"Den along comes de right time, an' you is here, dere an' in de odder place, ten or twenty of you in a party, all scattered out, wid a million Cossacks and Chinks 'round you. An' de night comes an' you is asleep, wid de guns laid aside—an' dey cuts youah huids off. Dat's all. An' den—an' den—wid you mangy houn' pups all daid, dey combines and takes de city here an' kills de princess and Mistah T'ang Wang. Dat's de frame-up. Now, how does you suckahs like it?"

When Yaller got to the part about cutting heads off and the killing of Ch'anyaun and T'ang Wang, the lines stiffened and the black faces that had been resentfully staring at Yaller became grim and hard. The idea of not believing Yaller never entered their minds. He was their first sergeant, a fighting man *par excellence*, who had nursed many of them through sickness as tenderly as a woman, and who was a framer himself of proved ability, as they all knew.

Now, as he stopped for breath, the line began to mutter.

"Mah Gawd, dat's de reason dey is so friendly!"

"Us is suckahs, like Yaller said."

"Ain't dat somepin? Ah nevah trusted dem Cossacks no way."

"Come on, us gits dem, does dey live at de north pole."

"Us gits dem Chinks too."

THEN Deacon Yancey spoke. He was one of the oldest men, and now his black face was gray-looking and his hands trembled a little as he stepped forward, but not from fear of Yaller Coudray. Yancey feared no living man. He had been given a trust, and had failed: that was why his hands were shaking and his face gray.

"Yaller, hit's mah fault. Ah was fust sergeant, and dese men was undah mah orders. Ah takes de blame."

"You takes de blame? You takes de blame fo' one hundred an' twenty men what used to be reg'lars, an' den lets a Cossack an' a Chink frame 'em, like a lot of— Mah Gawd, Ah can't talk no mo'. Ah got to do some fightin'. Stan' back, Yancey. You is too old. Ah gives you credit fo' being game an' ready."

Yaller peeled off his tunic with the first sergeant's stripes on the sleeves. "Step up heah, you dat made de talk 'bout smackin' down. Ah'll take you fust, as you is nearest. Ah'm a reg'lar, Ah is, an' Ah can lick dis whole roomful of tin militia, one by one or two by two—an' Ah'm sho' as hell goin' to. Put yo' hands up, boy, Ah'm comin' to you!"

The big colored man, who outweighed Yaller by thirty pounds, and who was a little younger, obeyed promptly. It didn't last long, that fight. The man may have been slowed up a little by the strong brandies and whiskies he had been drinking, but even if he had been in the pink of condition he couldn't have stood up to Yaller Coudray very long.

Yaller came in like the panther he looked, slipping past a straight left that greeted him. He feinted with his right, then his left fist seemed to sink into the man's middle, and the man's head came down as his body looked as if it were trying to double up. Yaller's right fist came up in a lightning-fast uppercut that connected with the down coming chin, and the man straightened up. He may have been out then, but with footwork as fast and light as a shadow all of Yaller's one hundred and eighty pounds came behind the right swing that crashed against the chin of the already falling man. If he hadn't been out before, he was now, and Yaller never gave him a second look as he hit the floor.

"Dat's one," he announced. "Step up heah, Sergeant Mose Whalen, you is numbah two. Ah licks dem what was noncoms fust."

Sergeant Mose Whalen promptly stepped forward, taking off the sweater he was wearing. He didn't show any great amount of joy, knowing Yaller, but he didn't show any fear either.

"Wait a minute," and Delicate Moss stepped forward to where Yaller was standing. "Don't I git me none of de gravy at all? How come all dis fightin' an' me not in on hit? Does two of you step out of de line. Any two, Ah ain't 'ticular."

"Dat's right," announced Sergeant Norton as the rest of the "reg'lars" came up. "White-eye, yo' isn't much bigger than me. Come up and git youah noppins."

Corporal Talliferro and Privates Slewfoot, Squint-eye and Alabam at once hurled personal challenges into the line. None of the men in the lines had shown any eagerness to be one of the two to accept Delicate Moss's invitation, because there was no question but that he could take any two of them apart, but the other invitations were accepted. So promptly, in fact, that the lines were no longer lines. There was a surge forward and Yaller realized that in another minute would come exactly what Norcross had warned him against. He was first sergeant in an instant.

"Ten-shun!" he yelled, in his best parade ground voice. Once again the old training reasserted itself and the men stood rigid.

"No mo' fightin' to-day," Yaller spat out disgustedly. "Ah forgot in de excitement dat de capt'n say not to lick you all at once."

"De capt'n?"

"Where at is he?"

"Capt'n heah?"

"Where at is de capt'n, Yaller?"

"Up at de palace wid de princess and Mistah T'ang Wang. Ah comes down to tell you dat dare will be inspection of all 'quipment dis afternoon at one—an' of all men too. Ah asks one question befo' goin' ahaid. What is you men?"

"Us de capt'n's men!"

"Us is reg'lars, same as you."

"Us didn't know all dat was goin' on, Yaller, honest."

"Reckon us is suckahs. Us see dat de princess was took care of like de capt'n said."

"Yaller, how does de capt'n feel 'bout us?"

"Us catches hell, dat's how."

"De capt'n," announced Yaller, so they all could hear, "jest grinned and said, 'Dem no-'count scoundrels is a lot of damn fools and does Ah git to 'em Ah gives 'em each forty million yeahs as chambahmaid to de mules.'"

A great gusty sigh of relief went up and the black faces once more began to smile.

"Doggone, Ah knowed de capt'n would understan'."

"Yeah? Git dem guns and fall in," commanded Yaller. "Ah gives you five minutes to git in shape wid dem uniforms. Ah holds an inspection myself befo' de capt'n comes. Noncoms in dere right places dis time. Form outside in de rear whereat us has room fo' troop front. Show me something! Snap into it! Lemme see how much reg'lar you has left. Us does ouah fightin' later on, wid a reg'lar ring an de capt'n for refereee."

"Ain't dare goin' to be *some* fights?" demanded a happy voice as the men ran for their lockers.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE SURPRISE ASSAULT.

NORCROSS'S inspection was over and he sat with Ch'nyaun, the Lady Anna and the nobles and their wives on a little knoll to the south of the palace and watched the long columns of Chinese swordsmen and lancers sweep by, headed by T'ang Wang.

At one o'clock he had gone down from the palace to find his men drawn up in the four-pointed star formation,

four machine guns at each point, mules and French seventy-fives in the center. The uniforms were cleaned and the metal polished to the nth degree. The machine gun ammunition was in orderly piles, the cartridge belts full, the Colt .45's hung at the proper angle, to an inch. Between each machine gun point the men stood about two feet apart.

As Norcross came up, his face impassive, he could not keep the pride in his heart from showing in his eyes. It was a fighting outfit, as deadly and efficient as one of their French seventy-fives. The men, already at attention, seemed to grow more rigid and straight as their lean, calm-eyed commander stood for a moment at the forward point.

Yaller Coudray was highly respected and obeyed without question, but Captain John Norcross—"de capt'n"—was to be loved and obeyed and followed anywhere, because he was "de capt'n" and that was all.

Norcross went along the line slowly, examining each rifle, bayonet and Colt, the machine guns, the French seventy-fives, and the mules, and each man's uniform and personal appearance.

To give Yaller Coudray and the men due credit, there were only a very few things that Norcross had to point out. None at all as far as the guns went. When he had finished, he went back to the point. "Non-commissioned officers front and center," he commanded. Then, as they lined up:

"I take command of this troop by order of the Princess Ch'nyaun. First Sergeant Coudray will rank as first lieutenant, Sergeant Norton will rank as second lieutenant, Sergeant Yancey will remain as first sergeant. The rest of the non-commissioned officers will be appointed by Lieutenant Coudray with the exception of Corporal Moss, who will rank as sergeant attached to headquarters. Lieutenant Coudray, you will keep the troop on its present alignment

until after the princess's review is over. Then I will come back and"—here Norcross smiled—"say a few words personally to these scoundrels. Take your posts."

As he walked back to the knoll he heard First Lieutenant Coudray, from the spot he had occupied, rasp, "At ease. Lieutenant Norton, see dat dem machine gun cases is back in line. Sergeant Yancey, is you de first sergeant of dis troop or is you a spectatah at a parade? If you is, get dat grin offen youah face and straighten out dem mules."

"How many men have you in line, Ch'nyaun?" asked Norcross.

"In all, six thousand, John. There are more—about a thousand, on duty throughout the city. The men of the city are fighting men also, but are not called for duty unless needed. These men that you see are—are the—"

"Standing army," supplied Norcross with a smile. "Well, they are mighty fine-looking—"

A dull boom sounded from the rear of the city, followed by another, then two in quick succession, then one more. From the valley and hills in front came the clear echo of the detonation of heavy guns, and over the rim of the west side of the crater poured wave after wave of Ch'iu's swordsmen.

"Ch'iu attacks!" and Ch'nyaun sprang to her feet. "See! T'ang Wang's swordsmen go to meet them! That noise, John? What—"

"They are blowing up the gates in the rear and battering those in front," answered Norcross calmly. "Stay here, Ch'nyaun. Tell T'ang Wang I will hold the gates," and he ran down the knoll. Already the bugle had blown "Attention" and then "Boots and Saddles" and was in the second bar of "Oh, They Keep the Pigs in the Parlor," which had been the battle hymn of B Troop in the Thirty-first Cavalry, when he reached his men.

The star had tightened, the men

standing and watching the upward rush of swordsmen, led by T'ang Wang and their officers to meet the men of Ch'iu who came over the rim as water does over the top of a dam.

LIEUTENANT COUDRAY, take twenty men and four machine gun squads to the gates in front. Dig in and hold. Let them batter the gates down, then stop them from coming in. That's all. Get going, and—keep them out! Lieutenant Norton, twenty men and eight machine guns, get up there with T'ang Wang. You are responsible for the Princess Ch'nyaun. Double-time it."

The two parties formed out of the star and started almost before Norcross finished talking.

"Come on, the rest of you birds; never mind those seventy-fives or the mules." Norcross ran toward where the mouth of the tunnel entered the crater. He was followed by fifty-odd men, with four machine guns. As he ran he heard the *rat-tat-tat-tat* of the machine guns and again the whiplash-like smash of the high explosive shells crashing against the gates in front.

There had not been enough snow in the mountains to prevent the transportation of men, even if the cold and occasional flurries of snow had kept the colored men in Ningyuan. Ch'iu had correctly figured that T'ang Wang had gone for Norcross and so had decided, with the Cossack *hetman*, to strike before he arrived.

They figured that Norcross's men would be more or less demoralized, and that without either T'ang Wang to lead his swordsmen or Norcross to command his men, they could take the city. The attack had been set for a week later, but the news of his return, which was brought to the Cossack by the party Norcross had surprised, had determined Ch'iu to attack at once. His men were ready and so were the Cossacks, brought down and held ten miles back in the mountains.

The party that Norcross had found was one of the outposts who had sent word into the city for the colored men to come out, intending to get information regarding how the men were distributed in the city. Ch'iu's spies had worked little by little, day after day, and night after night, at sapping tunnels run from some of the near-by houses which they had rented months before under the guise of workmen from the country. They had planted gunpowder mines under each gate of the watercourses at the sides in the rocks. It had taken time to do it, but two days before the last powder had been packed in and the fuses laid. At daybreak the news had come of the arrival of Norcross and T'ang Wang. The Cossack had ridden to Taiyaun and the decision to attack at once had been made.

The guns that Ch'iu had brought up from the south were already in position, three and four-inch ones; and he also had rifles for a thousand men. He had the guns, but not men who knew much about using them or keeping them in order. What neither he nor the Cossack *hetman* could foresee was that both Norcross and T'ang Wang, instead of resting and feasting on their return, would be holding a review at the moment of attack. After T'ang Wang left to find Norcross, Ch'nyaun had drawn in her lines a good deal, and the few spies that could have told her of the mounting of big guns in the hills and the sudden massing of troops did not live to win through to Ningyuan.

The Cossacks, dismounted, crept silently up the four watercourses, a thousand of them in all. The powder had done its work, and at each gate there was a twisted mass of iron, blown from the side walls. But at each gate were the swordsmen of Ch'nyaun whose duty it was to guard them.

They stood there, mostly young men, just far enough apart to allow

free swordplay, ranging from wall to wall, about four or five deep. As the first Cossacks came up the water-course on the extreme right they saw the silent, calm row of men, waiting to meet them, sword in hand.

"HERE are the dog brothers! Kill! Slash! Strike!" and the Cossacks surged forward. The first man, with a gold-hilted long straight sword of the Rajputs in the north, howled like a wolf as he closed with the young Chinese officer who had stepped forward to meet him. His howl changed into a sobbing gasp as his thrust was turned and the Damascus sword bit deep into his vitals.

The Cossacks were armed with sabers, yataghans, tulwars or whatever their individual fancy prompted, and they knew how to use them. But here they faced men who also knew how to use a sword; men trained by the best swordsmen in the Orient, the Manchu. Cossack after Cossack went down.

But twenty men with swords cannot hold back two hundred when they can be met man for man, and there was a final push forward, a flurry and tossing of blades, and the Cossacks went over the bodies of the men who had died in defense of their charge.

In the other watercourses the same thing happened, the Cossacks losing two and three for one, which was not vital; but what was vital—they lost time. As they came out in the fairly large space where the four watercourses debouched into the main one, they saw the final gate that stood between them and the city. This gate had been mined on both sides, but only one charge, the one on the left, had detonated. The gate hung loose, sagging down so that a space was opened that a man could crawl through. In front of it stood fifty swordsmen, all men of the main guard.

There was not a moment's hesitation. The Cossacks charged, were met by the swordsmen, the blades flashed

with the clear-cut ring of steel on steel. The Cossacks attacked on a front of twenty men and they came on, one line behind the other. As a line went down, the next was there, their swords licking out. Fifty men against eight hundred odd. The gate guards held them, one, two, three, four lines, then the Cossacks went over their bodies to the gate. As they came up and the first man climbed to the narrow opening, he shouted "Ho!" and fell back dead, his head cut open.

There, just back of the gate, commanding the opening, stood the Afghan wife of Corporal Combes, a sword in her hand, her slim body taut, waiting for the next man. She had been left at a house near the gate by the corporal until Combes could arrange living quarters for her. She loved him, she was an Afghan, she knew that if he were there he would defend the gate—so she had calmly picked up a sword in the house and gone to the gate, to do as he would have done.

The Cossacks saw her and yells of laughter went up.

"Ho! A delicate little flower!"

"Wait for me, I will come to you, O rose among nine thousand and seven!"

"Ho, brothers, a wife to win!"

She taunted them in turn. "Thy wives mother many mongrels, you dogs of the dunghills! To let a woman stop you! O fathers of unspeakable daughters! Swords are out! Why do you hang back?"

A sergeant snarled an order and two men climbed up, one beside the other. As the one who came to the opening reached it, he held his sword above his head so as to parry a cut, and the other thrust at the woman through the bars of the gate. Her lithe, dancing body avoided the thrust and her point darted under the sword held across the Cossack's face. He rolled down the pile of loose stone to the feet of his comrades.

The other, held back by the bars, could not reach her. The sergeant stepped forward, drawing a long, straight dagger, and poised it to throw—and then the delayed charge under the right side of the gate went off with a dull roar. The gate and the side wall crumpled in a cloud of dust and powder smoke.

The Afghan woman was hurled back into the mouth of the tunnel, which stretched for fifty feet before it opened up into the crater. Before the dust had settled the Cossacks were pouring through. The woman, dazed by the explosion, lay motionless, concealed by a pile of rock which had narrowly missed her. The Cossacks deluged through, packed from wall to wall, shouting wildly, waving their swords, to take and loot the city of Ningyuan.

THEY stopped yelling as soon as they saw what confronted them. Here were no Chinese with swords, or brave women, but big, grim-faced black men, and the fire of machine guns that piled the attackers in heaps of dead and wounded.

The press behind was so great that it literally spewed them out of the tunnel into the cleared space in front of the houses. The machine guns, two on either side of the mouth of the tunnel and back about one hundred yards, took frightful toll, yet so thick was the press that many came through the fire.

"Bayonets!" shouted Norcross to the bugler who was beside him. "We'll give the cold steel they're looking for!"

The men behind didn't need the bugler, most of them heard what Norcross said, but Highnote, who didn't know how to blow "Charge bayonets," being a cavalryman, blew, "Trot," "Gallop," "Charge"—which was about the same thing anyway. The machine guns had taken eight men, leaving Norcross with forty odd. They opened up a little and followed Norcross, his Colt .45 already in action.

"Mah God!" complained a machine gun man. "Dey is runnin' smack into ouah fiah!"

"Git on de entrance! Git on de entrance!" commanded the corporal. "Let 'nough come out fo' dem to mop up, den hold 'em back in de tunnel till dey is ready fo' de next bunch. Hot damn, look at de capt'n strut his stuff wid dat .45!"

The Cossack of the steppes met the ex-regulars of the Thirty-first United States Cavalry, sword against bayonet. Norcross's men did not know much about bayonets, but they did know about rifles, and the rifle and bayonet in their big hands became a deadly thing.

They were, for the most part, larger men than the Cossacks and with longer reach—and they were all fighting, not only with the lust of battle, but with the feeling that they had been played for "suckahs" by the men opposing them. It was a hard thrust or swing, a harder parry, a flash of steel, and the big men drove their bayonets home.

Here and there a man loosed off with his rifle to blow the Cossack's body clear away from the hilt of the bayonet, but in general it was simply cold steel. The Cossacks went down, those that had won through carrying with them fifteen of the colored men.

The machine guns were pouring a deadly fire across the mouth of the tunnel, a storm that nothing could live through. The Cossacks tried it, twice, and the tunnel mouth became almost choked up with dead and dying men.

"Let some mo' come out! Let some mo' come out!" shouted the corporal. "Capt'n done mopped up on dese. Cease firin', cease firin'!"

The bugle blew the same order a moment later. What the corporal had said was true. Not one Cossack that had come through the tunnel was on his feet. Norcross waved the machine gun squads in closer. His left arm hung limp from a sword-cut and his head

was bloody, but his blue eyes shone calm as ever. "Straight through the entrance," he shouted. "Shoot 'em back, you birds! Come on! What do you think this is, an Old Ladies' Home? Get going with those guns—four rounds each, then forward! We'll be right alongside!"

The machine guns poured their steel-jacketed death into the tunnel, and the Cossacks fled back to the broken gate. Into the tunnel came the deadly muzzles of the guns, over the bodies of Cossack dead and wounded, the bayonets beside and back of the gunners.

The Cossacks made a stand at the gate, behind the piles of rock. But the big colored men, led by their captain, climbed up, and once again it was bayonet against sword for a few moments, then the Cossacks retreated to the four watercourses. The machine guns took position on top of the rocks and twisted iron, and the gate was won back for the Princess Ch'nyaun.

"Drive them back!" shouted Norcross. "One gun to each watercourse, five rifles with each gun. Go get 'em, you no-count scoundrels! Drive 'em out of the way! Dig in behind those piles of rocks, the rest of you. Let's give 'em a *real* party!"

The Cossacks were without guns, not having expected enough organized resistance to warrant carrying their carbines. Being essentially swordsmen, they had relied on the sword. They realized their swords were powerless against machine guns and rifle fire, and they fled out of the watercourses into the hills, leaving behind four hundred who had fought their last fight.

"**B**ACK to the main gate," ordered Norcross as the last of the watercourses was cleared. "Sergeant Yancey, I will leave the machine guns here with you and twenty-five men. Ammunition will be sent you at once. I expect you to hold this position at all

costs. Corporal Combes, you will take charge of the machine gun section under Sergeant Yancey."

"Capt'n," answered Yancey solemnly as he saluted. "Us holds de gate. If dey come outta dat hole ag'in, you'll know us is daid."

"Fair enough. You, ten men on the right, come with me."

Norcross and the ten men came out of the tunnel on the double, to see Ch'nyaun and the Lady Anna, at the head of a thousand swordsmen, coming across the little square just beyond the first gardens and houses. Ch'nyaun and the Lady Anna were both mounted, as were several of the nobles with them.

They rode up to Norcross, and Ch'nyaun reined in her horse. She was still dressed in her robes of State, and her little head still carried the headdress of a Manchu ruler. The jewel-hilted sword in her right hand glittered as blue lightning when she raised it high above her head in command for her swordsmen to halt.

"You have held them, John? T'ang Wang drives the dogs back over the rim. Is the way clear? I will teach these Cossacks, and flog them back to the wasteland!"

She was all Manchu, this dainty little princess, and her eyes blazed with the joy of battle. She sat her plunging horse as if born in the saddle. "Can my men get through? John—you are wounded!"

"Not badly. Yes, the way is clear. O war lord. The Cossacks flee to the hills."

"Then my men shall—John! You do not think I should send them?"

"No, although they are swordsmen of the best. See, Ch'nyaun, there are as many Cossacks that made the attack as you have men here; and back in the hills, near by, are many more. You would send your men into ambush to fight a foe that outnumbered them. Keep them here, O princess, to back up my men who hold the gate."

As Norcross began to speak the Lady Anna slipped from her horse and walked up to him. Her lovely face was calm and her gray-blue eyes were gentle and soft; as she looked at the lean, handsome face of the American, whose blue eyes were as calm as her own, hers seemed to get a darker blue. She came close and with delicate fingers felt about the saber-cut on his left arm near the shoulder. Without a word, she took one of the white silken scarfs from her neck and bound it around the wound, then stood at his side. Norcross smiled at her and took her hand in his, holding it as he would that of a child.

"Leave your men here if T'ang Wang does not need them," he said to Ch'nyaun. "My men are inside, holding the ruins of the gate."

"I will do as you say, John. I sent a thousand men to the gates in front."

"That is fine. If you will give us horses, princess, I will get to the gates in front with these men. I can hear that Ch'iu is still shelling it. The assault hasn't come yet."

Ch'nyaun gave an order and some of her officers dismounted. "Mount young men on these horses. I will go to the palace. T'ang Wang has two thousand men left, and the city is arming. I will gather them there in order that men may be sent to any part as needed. You are all right, O elder brother?"

"Yes," smiled Norcross as he released the Lady Anna's hand and mounted, his ten men already in the saddle. "It's more blood than hurt, little sister that I love. You are a general, as well as a war lord, O mighty ruler of a city."

"May I go with you, John?" asked the Lady Anna in French.

"Why, no, you'd better—yes, for part of the way, if you would like to."

She spoke in Chinese to Ch'nyaun, who nodded her head. Ch'nyaun was already starting for the tunnel with her officers and nobles, to see the

results of the fight. Some of the evidence lay on the ground at the mouth, and she calmly stepped over the bodies or around them, or waited for her officers to clear away the bloody mass, her eyes cold.

CHAPTER IX.

AMBUSH.

LIEUTENANT COUDRAY and his men, with the four machine guns, had reached the street that turned into the wider one that led directly to the gate, at much faster time than "on the double." From the gates, which were all of thirty feet wide, made so as to admit heavy loads from the mines and quarries, there was a street, fully fifty feet wide, that ran straight back for a hundred yards, then turned at an abrupt right angle to the left.

The mountain walls left in place by the volcano at the base, where the gates were, were at least seventy-five yards thick, gradually losing thickness as they rose to the height of two thousand feet. Ch'iu could have elevated his gun muzzles and dropped shells into the city, but his one thought had been to blow the gates apart, as Norcross had done in Taiyaun, and get in before the Cossacks, or at the same time, so as to protect his interests in the looting—and, incidentally, to throw his men at the Cossacks if a good chance came.

When Lieutenant Coudray arrived, the shells from Ch'iu's guns had torn the heavy iron and copper gates into a mass of twisted metal, and were now making the street an inferno of flame and steel. But the shells were only tearing through the stone house and going into the hill.

Once in awhile a fragment would glance and come up the street of the angle, but they were doing no damage, outside of the moral effect they were having on the Chinese. As for any effect on Coudray and the men with

him, the only noticeable one was that as they rested a moment after running part way up the street of the angle, one of the men said, "Brother, Ah wishes Ah had de money that gent'-mum got to spend on dem bam-a-lams."

"Ho, does you got it, Ah takes hit away from you wid de gallopin' ivories. Yaller, can us shoot some craps while us is waitin'?"

"What? Listen, boy, you is back in de army. How come dat Yaller stuff? Dat don't go until us is off duty. No, you can't shoot no craps. Save youah money, boy, till us gits off. Ah takes it den, maself. Git dem guns set—no, wait a minute! What happens is dis: when dat Chink gits tired of makin' a noise, den he sends de army in. Us got 'em by de short hair when dey comes around de corner. No use bein' right smack out in de street. Go git some of dem big cobblestones from ovah dare whereat dey was buildin' 'at house. Us makes some nests."

"Ain't dat somepin'?"

"Yaller, you sho' has got de brain—Ah means, yes, suh, Lieutenant Coudray, right away!"

"Hot damn, ain't dat goin' to be pork chops and gravy fo' us?"

"How about some of de Chinks gittin' dem stones, Yal—lieutenant?"

Some of the Chinese who lived near the gates had promptly come out of their hiding places, old men, who were too old to wield a sword, and women and children. The rest had gone to the palace grounds.

"Hey, you birds, listen to dis po'try Ah jest made," and the poet of the outfit started right in without waiting to be asked:

"Us makes us some pretty little nests,
Bein' del'cate birds, what needs sheltah.
De Chinks come round, heltah-skeltah;
And den wid ouah babies, us does de rest."

"Boy, you is some poet! Man howdy, if Ah could do dat Ah'd—"

"What de hell is dis, some lit'rary meetin'? Dem shells is slacken' down. Nevah min' dem old men doin' youah work. Tote dem rocks!" ordered Coudray.

"Comin' up, lieutenant! Doggone. Ah bet de capt'n is moppin' up on dem Cossacks. Wish Ah was dare. Foolin' us like dey did!"

BACK about a hundred yards from the angle, Coudray built a wall of the heavy square stones, about four feet high, with openings for two machine guns. The wall ran the width of the street.

Then, a hundred feet back, he built another, a little higher, with placements for two machine guns at either end, high enough so that they could get clearance over the first wall. Twenty-eight husky colored men, aided by all the Chinese who could carry a block, can build a lot of wall in a few minutes.

"Dat's 'nuff," announced Coudray, just as the shells stopped. "Git dem Chinks back outta de way and git dem guns ready. Sergeant Moss, you takes command of de rear line. Ah takes de front, personal. Ten men in each line wid de machine gunnahs."

Sergeant Delicate Moss had no business being there, having been made headquarters sergeant only a few minutes before, but he had eased out of Norcross's sight, and before Yaller Coudray and his party were a thousand feet on their way, Sergeant Moss was among those present. Under almost any other conditions, he would have stuck close to Norcross, but he had received a strong hunch that he might be detailed to stay with the mules and seventy-fives, and he craved action.

"Dey'll be along in a minute," announced Yaller. "Slewfoot, you and White-eye sneak up to de corner and peek round. Stay dare till dey gits to de gate."

TO BE CONCLUDED NEXT WEEK.

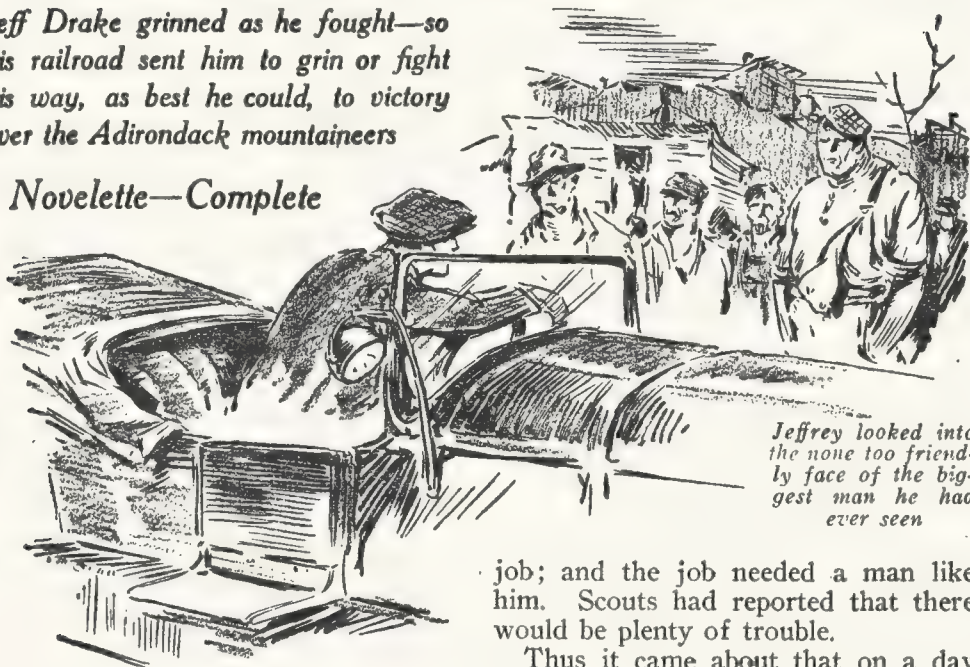
Right of Way

By WILLIAM MERRIAM ROUSE

Author of "Men of Iron," "The Hawk of Painted Rocks," etc.

Jeff Drake grinned as he fought—so his railroad sent him to grin or fight his way, as best he could, to victory over the Adirondack mountaineers

Novelette—Complete



Jeffrey looked into the none too friendly face of the biggest man he had ever seen

CHAPTER I.

WARNED.

ALL the tough jobs of the Champlain and Hudson Company went to Jeffrey Drake. The company, a vast owner of mines and railroads, paid him one of the salaries of which young men dream because he was a good-natured fighter. It had been said at a directors' meeting that Drake could hit a man on the nose or buy a right of way from under the very locomotive wheels of a rival company without getting anybody mad.

So they sent Jeff Drake into the Adirondacks to see about building a branch from the company's main line; a branch that would open a deposit of iron ore and later on, it was hoped, make the stockholders believe in Santa Claus. Drake was the man for the

job; and the job needed a man like him. Scouts had reported that there would be plenty of trouble.

Thus it came about that on a day when the sky was unbelievably blue and the mountains were dressed in the fresh green of June, Jeffrey Drake drove his powerful roadster up from the Dunder River road. He was headed toward the massed peaks of Coon Mountain. Behind him, along the river, lay the main line of the railroad.

The deposits of ore were at the foot of Coon Mountain, on land owned by the company. Somewhere ahead, this side of the granite studded heights, there was a shanty-town scattered across the proposed right of way. Drake now and then caught glimpses, off to the left, of another sprawling mountain which was known as Crowquill. He had been told that from Crowquill to Lake Champlain there was a rambling highway called Bildad Road, the principal products of which were hard cider and kitchen dances.

With an expert hand Drake guided

his car along the dirt road, which was in fairly good condition now that the spring mud had dried up. The road was inclosed by two nearly solid walls of green, so close did the trees and brush grow, and Jeffrey kept his speed down to a minimum against the rare chance of meeting another car. This did not seem likely, for grass thrived in the middle of the highway and it had been fully an hour since he had met any one.

He had set out that morning from the hotel in Valeboro, the county seat, to call on one Elijah Truman, who owned most of the land that the company wanted. It seemed to Drake now, as he crawled up and up over winding miles, that the tempo of life had magically slowed. Valeboro had been sleepy enough, but he could not imagine any one in these mountains caring whether or not a railroad was built. And, strangely enough, his reaction was one of peace rather than irritation.

Suddenly the green walls broke away on each side and Jeffrey Drake found himself looking upon what must be the shanty-town of which he had heard. In the midst of an area of partially cleared land, jagged with ancient stumps, as many as two score sheds and shacks were scattered without any order except that the majority of them faced the road.

Some of the buildings were of unhewn logs, but most of them were frame structures; some weather-stripped, some covered with tarred paper. A few boasted clapboards. Here and there a real chimney of brick or stone trailed smoke upon the clear air, but the mode apparently favored the chimney of stovepipe, thrusting up rustily to the weather.

Jeffrey stepped on the brakes, for there were children and dogs playing in the road. He blew his horn. The dogs gave tongue. A handful of men got up from choice places in the sun, lounged around corners. The more or

less unkempt heads of women and girls appeared in the doorways. The roadster came to a smooth stop in the middle of the settlement.

DRAKE leaned over the car door, smiling. He had the steady eye of a boxer and, sweeping the faces before him, he fixed his gaze upon the broad and none too friendly face of one of the biggest men he had ever seen. This fellow had shoulders of a breadth to choke an ordinary doorway, and he was built in proportion. Drake estimated that he stood six feet three or four.

One suspender, over the shoulder of a stained blue shirt, held up a shapeless pair of overalls. They swung above shoes of a size suited to the man. Under the gaze of the newcomer he shifted a chew of tobacco from the right to the left cheek and nodded curtly to a fat and eager henchman who stood beside him. The fat spokesman approached the car.

"Am I on the road to Elijah Truman's house?" asked Jeffrey, agreeably.

"You be," answered the man with a slight wheeze. He rested a hand on the shining hood of the roadster, and his small eyes gleamed. It was, indeed, a most superior car. "Yes, sir! Go right on straight ahead and keep that fust peak of the mountain in front of ye. You can't miss Lige Truman's place. White house. Left hand side of the road. Lilacs and posy bushes in the dooryard. Aiming to see, Lige, be you?"

Jeffrey Drake had a touch of genius for guessing what the other fellow was thinking; this was one of the qualities that made him a good boxer. Now he felt sure that the giant, conserving his own dignity, had sent a loquacious lieutenant to draw the stranger out. Nothing could have suited Drake better.

"Thanks," he said. "Yes, I've got business with Mr. Truman. What

place is this? I'm a stranger here. I've just come to Valeboro."

"This ain't rightly a place at all, mister. 'Round here they call it Stovepipe City. Big Jim Mack over there—he's kind of champeen of the city. Who might you be?"

"My name's Jeffrey Drake," with a smile. "I'm interested in some property here."

The fat man turned and looked significantly at the "champeen." Big Jim Mack took his hands out of his pockets and strolled up to the car. His gaze was level, hard; the look of a ruthless and self-confident man.

"Railroad business you got with Truman, ain't it?" he asked harshly.

"Yes," replied Jeffrey, and he tried to assume his most guileless expression. "I'm a representative of the Champlain and Hudson Company."

"Huh!" Mack turned and walked away. As though at a signal the fat man stood back from the car. A little wind of whispers swept the group that surrounded it. The engine was running. Drake went into gear.

"Much obliged for the help," he said amiably. "See you again, no doubt!"

There was no answer in words. A dirty-faced youngster, not yet old enough to share in the prejudices of Stovepipe City, waved a hand. Jeffrey swung his glove, laughing. The roadster pulled smoothly out of the domain of Big Jim Mack.

Drake was now perfectly clear in his mind as to at least one part of the trouble ahead of him. It consisted of a gang of roughnecks led by as tough an egg as he had ever seen. In fact, Jeffrey was of the opinion that Big Jim Mack might be put down as the champeen of all tough eggs.

While he considered Stovepipe City, Drake was again winding through a densely wooded country. He was brought back with a jerk to his immediate surroundings when a heavy report shattered the morning peace. Al-

most coincident with the report the hood of the car rang to a smart blow. Instantly Jeffrey stopped and looked in the direction from which the report had seemed to come.

Through an opening in the trees he saw a hillside, solidly green and offering excellent cover. A little spot of smoke was drifting there. On the hood there was a small indentation where the missile had struck a glancing blow.

"Black powder and buckshot," he said to himself, "and that was probably a warning, or I'd be as full of holes as a colander. He fired ahead of the car."

HE was unarmed, but he was exceedingly angry. He grew more so as he sat there and stared at the insolent blankness of that hillside. The road was winding—very likely Big Mack or one of his men had been able to take a short-cut. They wanted to drive him out. Suddenly he gave a low, but not strictly mirthful laugh, locked his car, and sprang out.

He plunged into the underbrush and headed as straight as he could for the spot where he had seen that drift of smoke. It was useless, of course, unless the man wanted to be discovered. Jeffrey hoped he did. After the first patch of briars Drake was ready to fight Big Jim Mack himself.

In a matter of ten minutes he was back in the road, convinced that he was no woodsman. The enemy did not want to be found. He looked toward his car and halted, bewildered. A tall, rather well built man, dressed in a respectable whipcord suit and hunting boots, was examining the roadster. This was no Stovepipe City thug. And yet in one hand he carried loosely an old-fashioned, double-barreled shotgun.

"Mister," said the stranger, turning as though perfectly aware of Jeffrey's presence by the noise he had made. "you've got a nice car there."

Drake went forward on his toes, by no means convinced that this meant

peace. However, the man was shaved. Although his dark eyes were too close together he was by no means ill-looking. It was more the air with which he carried himself than his appearance that made for suspicion.

"It won't be a nice car long if they keep shooting at me," replied Jeffrey. "Somebody just tried to sprinkle me with buckshot from that hill!"

"You don't say! And you went looking for 'em?"

"I'm still looking," said Drake grimly, with level gaze. The stranger became thoughtful.

"Might have been hi-jackers that liked the looks of your car," he suggested. "Or maybe some of those Stovepipe City fellers. They're kind of hard tickets. I guess you're a stranger around here."

"I'm getting acquainted," said Jeffrey, with a grin. "Do you live here?"

"Yes. Over toward Crowquill Mountain. Name's Ferguson Slater."

"Mine is Jeffrey Drake. I'm on my way to see Elijah Truman. Would you like a lift?"

The lack of curiosity on the part of this Ferguson Slater was not normal. Drake wanted to see more of him. He watched a flicker in the close-set eyes.

"Sure, I'll ride. Going that way myself."

Slater settled himself beside Jeffrey with the shotgun between his knees. A lumpy pocket pressed against Drake's thigh; he had seen the outline of cartridges behind the whipcord of Slater's coat. In reaching for matches Jeffrey got his hand into that coat pocket, apologized, and drew it out—with a loaded shell in his palm.

They climbed higher toward the rugged sides of Coon Mountain; and Slater's only remarks were mutterings of admiration at the performance of the engine. Jeffrey made every effort to appear pleased. He wanted to seem as dumb and trusting as possible.

"There you are!" exclaimed Slater, suddenly, rising in his seat. They had

come to a sloping, upland farm where a little meadow and a few acres of rocky pasture had been wrested from the forest. A comfortable white house was set in lilac bushes, now in blossom. Well grown maples shaded a lawn inclosed by a white picket fence. Drake was surprised. Stovepipe City had led him to expect nothing like this.

"Is that Truman?" he asked, as a slightly stooped but powerful-looking old man came around the corner of the house.

"That's him!" Slater swung himself over the car door without bothering to open it. He was through the gate and talking confidentially to Truman before Jeffrey had entered the yard.

DRAKE took his time, and when he sauntered up to the two men he was met by an apparently complete change of attitude on the part of Ferguson Slater.

"Lige," said Slater, in a voice fairly oozing good fellowship, "this here is Mr. Jeffrey Drake. He got kind of a rough welcome to Coon Mountain, like I said. You and me have got to show him they's some good folks here!"

"How do you do, sir?" Jeffrey held out his hand. It was instantly inclosed in a grip of steel and he found himself looking into a pair of dark blue eyes which were filled with the light of a spirit younger by half a century than the body of Elijah Truman.

"I guess mebbe you're from the railroad company," said Truman.

"Yes, sir," replied Jeffrey. It was amazing how everybody knew or guessed his business. But that was all right. The more dumb they thought him the sooner they would show their hands.

"Come and set down." Truman led the way to a wicker table and some chairs grouped under one of the maples. He turned toward the house and boomed. "Rose! Fetch us some cider and doughnuts."

Ferguson Slater was beaming upon Truman, and equally upon the stranger from the city. He leaned his elbows upon the table and rubbed his hands. It was a marvelous transformation.

At the sound of a light and rapid step Jeffrey shifted his attention from Slater. His lower jaw relaxed; his lips parted. A girl in as smart a sports dress as any Fifth Avenue shop could produce was coming behind a heavily laden tray. She was a girl among girls; a priceless combination of smartness and rustic beauty. Her cloud of black hair had never known shears; the rich color in her cheeks had been put there by the whipping winds of Coon Mountain. Over the top of the tray looked a pair of eyes which duplicated the sparkling blue of Lige Truman's keen gaze.

Drake sprang to his feet and reached for the tray. Slater got up awkwardly. Truman chuckled; and just for an instant a frown marred the newly acquired benevolence of Ferguson Slater's face.

"This is Rose, my granddaughter," announced the old man. "You better set down, my gal. Then Ferguson and Mr. Drake can look at ye. That'll keep 'em quieter."

Rose nodded and laughed. She spoke a word of greeting to Slater and took the chair that Jeffrey placed for her. Small, well-kept hands moved among the glasses; poured the cider and passed the doughnuts. Jeff fought dizzily to get his mind back to railroads and ore deposits.

"Young man," said Truman, "I expect you've come to buy some land of me."

"Exactly," replied Jeffrey, pulling his gaze away from Rose. "The Champlain and Hudson Company wants to buy a right of way from Lots Nos. 50 to 83 of the Great Rock patent to the nearest point on the railroad. Our legal department has investigated the records in the county clerk's office at Valeboro and we find

that you own practically all of the land involved."

"I own it, but it ain't never done me any good," said Truman. "I knowed the company was looking things over. Since snow went off this spring they's been some young whippersnappers running around in the woods peeking through little spy glasses."

"Grandfather knows they were engineers with transits!" laughed Rose. "Don't let him fool you!"

"Huh!" snorted Truman. "Mean to say I think I could fool a smart young feller from the city?"

Ferguson Slater laughed much louder than was necessary. Drake had the feeling that some batteries were about to be unmasked, and soon.

"We've had the only practicable route surveyed," he admitted. "It runs almost as the crow flies from Lot No. 50 to a point near Sherman's Crossing on the main line."

TRUMAN turned and stared out over the billowing woodland which rolled upward, hill on hill, to the foot of the mountain. "Couldn't you figger to build that branch line off a little mite to one side?"

"We'd have to cut and fill all the way," said Jeffrey. "The cost would be staggering. And it would not run on your land if we shifted the route. We expect to pay an honest price for the right of way."

"I ain't much interested in the money," replied the old man, slowly. "I got me a good dog, and Rose, and a home with a cider orchard. What more does a man want?"

"Nothing!" admitted Drake, after a moment of astonished silence. It was a long time since he had heard a man refuse money. He was set back on his heels.

"Well, then," said Lige. "There you be!"

Ferguson Slater smiled. Rose looked away. Jeffrey drew a long breath.

"But you aren't using the land, Mr. Truman. Even if you're not interested in the money I should think you'd be willing to sell for the sake of progress!"

"Would you rather see Rose with her mouth and cheeks all progressed up out of one of them little dewdabs the gals get in drug stores or would you rather see her the way she is?"

"The way she is!" cried Jeffrey, with such spontaneous fervency that Rose grew red from brow to rounded throat.

"There you be!" triumphantly. "Progress! They'll be engines a snorting up here into the mountains, and a snorting down again. They'll skeer the game.

"They won't be a fox nor rabbit in five mile that can raise a fambly in peace! Most usually progress is jest another name for misery."

"I can't deny it," said Drake, "but it's going to go on and we might just as well play the game."

He was getting licked harder every minute. There was a mean look in the eye of Slater, but the smile of Rose was consolation. She looked as if she approved of him.

"Durned if I ain't beginning to like ye!" exclaimed the old man, suddenly. "You got sense even if you be trying to upset the peace and dignity of Coon Mountain!"

"Mr. Truman," Jeffrey leaned forward earnestly, "what's the big reason for not selling? I know you mean what you say, and so do I, but there's something else on your mind!"

"They is," agreed Lige readily. "The boys in Stovepipe City would be drove out. They ain't got nowhere to go, nothing to go with, and nothing when they get there. Jest a passel of young uns and dogs. Where they be now the hunting and trapping's good and they make out to live."

Drake felt that at last he had reached the heart of the matter. The situation did not seem impossible.

"I can promise them a reasonable compensation for moving," he said. "Men who are big enough to be at the head of a company like the Champlain and Hudson are big enough to be human."

Lige Truman filled and lighted a corncob pipe. The fingers of Slater drummed on the table. Rose turned a glass around and around.

"Young man," said Truman, "I do need a little mite of money and if I could see a way to sell that right of way without doing any damage to the boys in Stovepipe City, mebbe I'd think it over."

"But, Lige!" protested Slater. "You don't need to worry about money! I told you—"

"Yes, he does need to worry about money!" asserted Rose, with a steely ring in her voice.

"I'm going to see Big Jim Mack!" said Drake.

"Ferguson says somebody took a shot at ye!" chuckled Truman. "It was awful poor shooting!"

Swift as thrusting blades the eyes of Rose turned upon Slater. It was the first she had heard of that incident. Slater laughed and wriggled his shoulders uneasily.

"Anybody'd think it was me, the way you look, Rose!" he exclaimed. Old Lige lifted bushy eyebrows, but he made no further direct reference to the shooting. His mind seemed to be well occupied with more important matters.

"Rosie," he said, "you and me'll keep Ferguson here with us while this young feller goes to see Big Mack."

"I might help if I went along—" began Slater.

"No, Ferguson!" The eyes of the old man twinkled. "I don't want you should run into danger."

Drake grinned amiably. He turned to Rose.

"If I were going anywhere but to Stovepipe City, I should ask you to go for the drive."

"And I think I should accept," she told him.

CHAPTER II.

BIG JIM MACK.

JEFFREY had just decided that he was nearing Stovepipe City again when a whiplike report made his hand twitch on the wheel. He flung a glance right and left. That had been a rifle shot. He did not believe it had been fired at him, for it seemed impossible that one of Big Mack's men, bred to the mountains, should miss such a target as the roadster. Perhaps it was a signal of his return.

A moment later Drake's suspicion was confirmed. He rolled into Stovepipe City and found the place thick with men, women, children and dogs. There were three times as many as he had seen before. The men glowered. And more than a score of them began to press in when he stopped. Big Mack was in the lead, and this time there was no laziness about him. He dispatched a neat stream of tobacco juice and stepped up to the car.

"I figgered you might come back this way," he said, with narrowing eyes, "but it ain't a healthy road for you!"

"No?" Jeffrey smiled at him. "Mr. Truman thought I'd better run down to see you."

"Lige Truman?" echoed Big Mack. Astonishment held him. "Mean to say Lige Truman sent you here?"

Jeffrey did some quick thinking, and planning. Two or three of the huskiest men in sight had crowded up close enough to reach for him. There was a jam in front, but to the rear the road was clear. His foot was still on the clutch. Carelessly he shifted into reverse, holding the clutch.

"Why, yes," he replied, looking straight into the greenish-brown eyes of Big Jim Mack. "You see, I want to buy a right of way from Mr. Tru-

man. You probably know all about it. He didn't want to sell because you people would be driven out. But he suggested I might see if I could fix it up with you."

"You got a heluva nerve!" Big Mack roared with mighty laughter. His men began to laugh. The absurd statement of this railroad fool from the city was passed back among the crowd and the air above Stovepipe City fairly shook.

Jeffrey Drake smiled in sympathy. It seemed almost as though he enjoyed the joke.

"The railroad company," he said, when the laughter had died, "would be willing to pay you generously for your losses. As their representative I can promise to buy your buildings here at a fair price. We'll even help you to get located somewhere else. And we'll offer construction jobs to those who want to work. After all, the land belongs to Mr. Truman."

"Say!" Mack put a foot on the running board. "We don't want to move! See? We ain't got to move and we ain't going to move! We're looking out for ourselves!"

"You mean that Elijah Truman is looking out for you," suggested Drake.

The hard face of Big Jim Mack grew brick-red. It was a sore spot that Drake had touched. He snarled.

"Lige Truman is the only one of his kind! But that ain't none of your business! You and your shiny car better go back where you come from if you know what's good for ye! Us fellers know which side our bread's buttered on!"

"Ah!" exclaimed Jeffrey, allowing his smile to grow broader. "So there's some one else in this? Who's persuading you to fight the railroad?"

It was a wild shot, but it went home. Big Mack stared. Then he blazed with anger.

"You better move on afore you get mussed up!" He leaned over the car door. A long and mighty arm pointed

down the mountain road. "Start, and keep moving!"

"I'm going the other way," announced Jeffrey, and he shifted his foot from the clutch. The roadster shot backward, and Big Jim Mack stretched his six feet and more on the ground.

Drake trusted to a nearly perfect driving sense to keep to the wheel tracks. Big Mack sprang up instantly and he was ahead of the other pursuers. Just as the car slid into the woods he leaped to the running board. Jeffrey leaned forward and struck, and felt his fist meet the nose of Big Jim.

BY a miracle he saved the car from being ditched, and left Mack weaving dizzily in the road. For five minutes Drake made the roadster do all it could in reverse. Then he dared to back and turn on a grassy indentation in the roadside line of the forest. He climbed to the home of Lige Truman with his foot pressing hard on the accelerator.

It had been rather a long wait, but the three were still at the wicker table. Their faces questioned him as he walked into the yard.

"You don't look damaged," said Slater.

"Disappointed?" asked Jeffrey. Rose laughed.

"He offered to bet Mack would beat you up!" she said.

"As you see!" remarked Drake. "Nothing is damaged but the dignity of Big Jim Mack."

He sketched his interview with a light touch. Only Rose seemed to find humor in the story.

"We got to make allowances," said Lige, gravely. "Big Jim don't believe nothing he can't see. He's powerful attached to that mess of shacks down there. I know jest how he feels."

"Ye-ah," sighed Slater. "I feel the same way about my place."

"Somebody's been tampering with Mack!" exclaimed Rose. Jeffrey had purposely failed to report his sugges-

tion of the same thing to Big Jim. Now he regarded Rose Truman with great interest.

"Shoo, now!" said her grandfather. "You got funny idees, Rose!"

"Who'd want to?" asked Slater.

"Somebody that wanted to hold the railroad company up!" answered the girl.

Slater laughed and shrugged. Jeffrey turned to the old man.

"Mr. Truman," he said, "I understand that you'll sell to my company if Big Mack and his people move, and that if they don't you won't sell to us. Is that right?"

"That's it," replied the old man with a touch of sadness in his voice. Slater grinned; he looked like a cat licking cream. Drake got up and held out his hand to Truman.

"You'd better not go back the way you came," said Rose. "They might have a log across the road."

"You can go back to Valeboro through my country, and over Bildad Road," suggested Slater.

"That's good advice," said Truman. "If you was going to come back again I'd say it would be safer that way."

"Oh, but I am!" cried Jeffrey, and he turned to Rose. "Would you like to go driving with me to-morrow? I'll call for you any time after sunrise."

"What?" gasped Slater. "You goin' to stay around here?"

"Yes, indeed!" smiled Jeffrey. "I've just got started on this right of way affair. I know where I stand now!"

"Come any time after breakfast," said Rose.

CHAPTER III.

PATRIARCH OF BILDAD ROAD.

THAT evening Jeffrey Drake sat on the screened porch of the hotel at Valeboro, after an excellent dinner, and smoked many pipes in great comfort. He had had a very busy day

after leaving the mountains and he was much pleased with the result. By diligent inquiry he had accumulated much information about the men of Bildad Road and of Coon Mountain. He felt almost acquainted with some whom he expected shortly to meet.

Jeffrey thought and planned far into the future as he sat and smoked there in the quiet of the June evening. He reached certain conclusions and he mapped out a definite course of action. But every step of that course of action he intended to keep strictly to himself until it was taken, even from Rose Truman. The Champlain and Hudson Company had good reason to pay him a large salary.

He slept and awoke to another day with several more details worked out; and because he wanted to be sure of keeping his engagement he took the Bildad Road route back to the Truman place. On the trip out yesterday Drake had given little heed to the country through which he passed, being much concerned with other things. He had noticed only that Bildad was scattered with dwellings, which varied from disreputable shacks to almost respectable farmhouses.

To-day he let the roadster saunter along while he observed the inhabitants of Bildad and their mode of life. He saw a man splitting wood without great enthusiasm, and a very pretty girl hanging out clothes. She waved at him. In front of one shack an earnest but somewhat unskillful fight was going on, while a woman approached the unheeding battlers with a steaming teakettle. A bewhiskered old man whom Drake met held up a jug and shouted an invitation.

It appeared to Jeffrey that he had found a neighborhood slightly superior to Stovepipe City, and much more jovial. What interested him more than anything else was that Bildad Road and Stovepipe City enjoyed an age-long feud, according to the best information to be had in Valeboro.

At the home of Elijah Truman, Jeffrey found Rose cutting lilacs, while her grandfather looked on and puffed comfortably at his corn-cob pipe. They greeted him cordially, and Rose put an armful of blossoms into the car.

"You won't mind stopping so that I can leave these at a house on Bildad Road?" she asked.

"I won't mind anything you want to do," Jeffrey told her.

"Them ain't for Ferguson, be they?" asked Lige, with an innocent eye.

"Full of jokes this morning, aren't you, grandfather?" exclaimed Rose. She snuggled down in the seat beside Drake with a sigh of content. "This is fine! Let's go!"

After they had driven a mile or so in silence he stopped the car and turned so that he could look into her eyes. They met his own with frank friendliness.

"Do you wish me luck, Miss Truman, in getting that right of way from your grandfather?"

"Yes," she replied without hesitation. "I do, but I don't see how you're going to get it!"

"May I ask you some questions?"

"Yes."

"So far as your grandfather is concerned the only real obstacle is his extreme regard for the feelings of Big Jim Mack?"

"It isn't just the way you make it sound. Grandfather is absolutely sincere. And nobody fools him, unless it's through his sympathies. He understands the feeling that mountain people have for their homes because he has it himself. He won't see Mack and the others forced off the land where they've taken root. I think he'd give them the land before he'd drive them out. And money means absolutely nothing to him. I think he's the most kindly, unselfish man I've ever known."

"I understand," said Jeffrey, and he did. "But yesterday Mr. Truman admitted he could use some money."

"Mr. Drake, I'm going to tell you all the truth. Grandfather borrowed a couple of thousand dollars to send me to school. He mortgaged his home, although I didn't know it at the time. The mortgage will be foreclosed soon if he doesn't pay it."

"He'd let himself be driven out, rather than the Stovepipe City people?"

"He says they've got babies. Yesterday he said he wouldn't be able to look his own dog in the face if he made those people homeless!"

"BUT yesterday Slater said that your grandfather need not worry about money!"

"Ferguson has money to lend—on security!"

"He could take over the mortgage, Miss Truman," suggested Jeffrey.

"Yes, or buy that tract where you want a right of way. There's plenty of firewood on it, but no timber. Nobody wants to buy firewood standing here in the mountains. There's too much. But Ferguson would buy it. And if he can persuade grandfather that he'll leave Stovepipe City as it is he'll get the land, I think."

"And hold up the railroad company for an exorbitant price!"

"You and I guess the same guesses, don't we?" she laughed.

"We did yesterday—about the influence on Big Jim Mack!"

"We did! And now do you know everything you want to know?"

"Everything except how Ferguson Slater stands with you!" said Jeffrey.

"Think it over, stupid," she exclaimed. "Or ask him! There he is now, standing under his own vine and fig tree!"

They were drifting past the most prosperous house that Drake had seen in the mountains. He had noted it earlier as probably belonging to a man of substance. It was ugly, recently built, and out of harmony with its setting. Slater stood leaning upon an ornamental iron fence. He raised his

hand to his cap as they passed, but there was no smile on the face under the cap.

"Where do you want to stop with the lilacs?" asked Jeffrey.

"I'm taking them to an old man who was sick last winter," she said. "His name is Zeke Blungy. The lilacs are an excuse to look around and see if he needs anything."

"Blungy!" exclaimed Drake, softly. "He's one of the patriarchs of Bildad Road, isn't he?"

"How do you know?"

"Because I spent some time asking questions in Valeboro," grinned Jeffrey. "I was going to call on Zeke Blungy to-day."

"It's the next house," she told him, thoughtfully.

Jeffrey stopped before a weather-beaten little structure which seemed to be sinking restfully into its own cellar. They went up a grass-grown path and knocked. Within roared a voice which betrayed no weakness.

"Come in!"

They entered a neat but littered room, with a cookstove on one side and a blanket-covered couch on the other. From the couch rose, with some difficulty, an old man of gaunt but heroic frame. Gray threaded whiskers hid all the lower half of his face, and his throat; they even grew out of his ears, and reached up to meet a thatch of hair. A bony nose projected between hair and whiskers. Zeke Blungy needed but a handkerchief around his head to pose as the chief of a pirate crew.

"Rose," he said, "you're pretty enough to make a corpse get up and dance a jig! Ain't them posies nice?"

The wild-eyed old roughneck filled a crock with water and crowded in the armful of purple lilacs. Rose arranged them.

"This is Mr. Jeffrey Drake," she said, with a smile. "You didn't give me a chance to introduce him, Zeke."

"It's the railroad feller." Blungy spoke as though that fact were suffi-

cient introduction. He shook hands. "I heerd about ye."

"And I've been told that you are the man I need for some work I'm going to have done," said Jeffrey.

"Huh!" Blungy snorted, and his eyes assumed a far-away look. "I ain't partial to work, no time. But I've had the rheumatiz. Carried a hoss chestnut in my pocket last winter, but it didn't ward off the rheumatiz like they say it will. Couldn't do no hunting. So mebbe I would work. I dunno. What is it you want done?"

"I've had a little trouble with Big Jim Mack—"

"Now you're talking!" Zeke fairly pranced, regardless of twinges. "If you want Stovepipe City cleaned out I kin—"

"**W**AIT a minute!" cried Jeffrey, laughing. "I was going to say I'd had a little trouble and couldn't get the right of way I want just now. I'm going to begin some other work on the company's property. I'd like to have you collect thirty or forty able-bodied men and report to me Monday at the ore tract. First-class wages to the men, a foreman's pay to you, and a bonus to every man if the job is carried through as I direct. What do you say?"

Drake realized that he was dealing with no mean intelligence as he looked into the eyes of Zeke Blungy. They were trying to read him, as to motive and honesty and ultimate design. It was a long moment before Blungy replied.

"I calculate to take up that offer," he said at last. "I'll get the boys together, and they'll be able-bodied. Some of us Bildaders is so able-bodied we chaw up tenpenny nails for breakfast and wash 'em down with kerosene oil!"

"Right!" Jeffrey got up to go. "You've got the idea and I know I can depend on you. See you Monday."

They shook hands on it; and Rose and Jeffrey left. When they were moving over Bildad again she laughed lightly.

"Now I wonder what you're up to! You aren't going to open those old mines without the only right of way that's worth having!"

"I'll reply in the idiom of the country," Jeffrey told her. "'Mebbe so an' mebbe not!' Anyhow, the air of Bildad Road is doing wonders for me mentally, and I want to stay here. Why, already I've learned that there's more than one way to skin a cat!"

"You knew that before you ever saw Bildad, Mr. Jeffrey Drake!" she declared emphatically. "But I want to warn you that you've got to catch your cat before you skin it!"

"And I," laughed Drake, "want to show you a wonderful view of the lake!"

CHAPTER IV.

JEFF DRAKE'S TOWN.

SIX weeks from the day when Jeffrey Drake had hired Zeke Blungy and then spent all of three hours showing Rose a view of Lake Champlain, the finishing touches were put to a neat and compact village at the extreme northern end of Coon Mountain. On the most distant of the lots belonging to the Champlain and Hudson Company, a matter of twoscore buildings clustered about a central square, where an artesian well furnished the best of water.

This was what Zeke Blungy and his gang had been hired to do; and it was the biggest sensation within the memory of the oldest mountaineer. In the village, in addition to the small houses, there were stables, woodsheds, all the buildings necessary to make self-sustaining the community that Jeffrey Drake had created where there had been unbroken forest.

From the first the Bildad Road

workmen had lived on the spot; at first in tents and then in the newly erected buildings. They appeared to be happy; some of the more domesticated even imported hens and sold fresh eggs to the camp cook. It was a womanless community. Those who wanted to do so were allowed to visit their homes in relays, but some of the men refused to go home at all, swearing for all the world to hear that Jeff Drake had provided them with the first peace they had known since they got married.

For Mr. Jeffrey Drake was now Jeff to every one of his devoted Bildaders, from old Zeke Blungy down to Runty Whipple, the potato peeler and dishwasher. The true inwardness of this was that he treated all of them just as he treated everybody, including the president of the Champlain and Hudson Company and the latest addition to a section gang. It helped, of course, that he had a stand up and knock down fight with a troublemaker, one Doolittle Jones. Jeffrey's fist and footwork was much admired. The battle resulted unfavorably for Jones.

The men agreed that Jeff was half crazy, for who but a lunatic would put pretty stained shingles on workmen's bunk houses and leave shade trees around them? But Bildad had as much fondness for the unusual as for a good joke—and more than this could not be said. Jeffrey was rapidly taking a place among the heroes of the road, such as tramp fiddlers, famous rough-and-tumble scrappers, and other men above the common run.

On the day when the last nail was driven, Jeffrey brought Rose Truman and her grandfather up to his village to look it over. Rose had seen it several times in process of construction, but Lige had not. He climbed down from the rumble seat and stood in silence, gazing with the first surprise Drake had ever seen upon his rugged face. Zeke Blungy advanced to meet him, as one patriarch to another. Lige

Truman was known as a friend to all the world, even if he was the patron of Stovepipe City.

"Will you come into the parlor and have some ice cream sody water, Lige?" asked Blungy, solemnly. Truman chuckled and brought out his corn-cob. He glanced over his shoulder and evidently thought he was far enough from the roadster so that he would not be heard.

"What's this young feller calculating to do, Zeke?" he asked.

"I figgered you'd know," replied Blungy, disappointedly. "If this is a construction camp I'm a circus horse!"

THE two old men moved away, and Rose turned to Jeffrey. In the six weeks past they had grown steadily better acquainted, in spite of all efforts of Ferguson Slater to the contrary. Jeffrey was sunk, and admitted it to himself. For the first time in his life he wanted to get married.

"What are you going to do with this gimcrack?" asked Rose.

"Oh, the company can use a village twice as big when they open the mines," he told her.

"You don't trust me!"

"Rose," he said, earnestly, "I trust you absolutely. But I've noticed that when I brag about my plans my chances of carrying them out always seem to get less. They lose force, somehow. But you'll know just what I'm going to do soon. A lot sooner than you think."

Before she could reply Ferguson Slater strolled up the woodroad that had been used as a means of communication between the camp and the highway. His old-fashioned shotgun was in the crook of his arm; his cap was pulled down over eyes which were taking in every detail of the scene before him.

Drake vaulted over the door of the car and flung a hasty word to Rose.

"I just thought of something that must be attended to. I'll be right back."

He walked rapidly to the neat building where his fat cook, Petey Bumps, was laboring over a baking of bread. Runty Whipple, with a burlap apron tied under his arms, struggled with a mound of dishes. Jeffrey crooked a finger and drew the dishwasher out of the cook house.

"Now's the time for the dirty work, Runt!" he said in a low voice. "Get busy!"

The round face of Whipple became, by reason of his distress, more ludicrous than nature had made it.

"By golly, I hate to do it! If it wasn't for you, Jeff, I wouldn't! Think of my repertation—"

"You bonehead!" growled Drake. "You'll be a hero when it's over! Everybody 'll say you've got brains!"

"I hadn't thought of that!" Runty brightened and began to sneak around the corner of the cook house. Jeffrey watched him with satisfaction, and after a minute or two returned to the roadster. Slater was talking to Rose; he sneered at the approach of Drake. They no longer made any pretense at friendship.

"Nice summer resort you've built," said Slater. "Care if I look it over? Or is they a right of way hid in some of them doll houses?"

"Help yourself," Jeffrey told him. "You're funny, Slater, but not the way you think!"

Ferguson Slater left them abruptly. He stopped to speak to Truman and Blungy, and then began to wander from building to building. He peered into all of them. He examined the water supply and finally reached the farther edge of the village.

Drake could still see him, standing meditatively in front of one of the little structures. It looked as though he were nosing for the secret of Jeffrey's intentions. Suddenly an undersized figure darted around the corner of the nearest building and grasped Slater by the arm. There followed a moment's conference; then Ferguson Slater, with

a backward glance to see whether he was observed, followed Runty Whipple out of sight.

Drake settled back with a laugh, and discovered that Rose had been watching with him. Now she searched his face with a speculative eye.

"Slater's been making up to my gang," he said.

"Or your gang is making up to Slater!"

"That was Runty Whipple," he told her. "Runty has poor taste in choosing his friends, hasn't he?"

"Either you're much more stupid than I thought," said Rose, "or you're twice as brilliant. Here comes grandfather and he's ready to go. I can tell by his walk."

Jeffrey wondered whether she were offended. If she were it could not be helped. He wanted no hint of a coming triumph to be betrayed to Ferguson Slater by her manner. Truman climbed into the car and they drove to the comfortable house under the maples. Jeffrey refused a pressing invitation to share a pitcher of cider with the old man.

"MY boy," said Lige as they parted. "I'm sorry I can't let ye have that right of way! Honest, I be! I like the way you go at things and get 'em done!"

"But you haven't made any other arrangements, have you?" exclaimed Jeffrey, while his heart skipped a beat. "You haven't given any obligations?"

"No, Jeff," replied the old man. "Not yet I ain't. But the mortgage is due, and Ferguson's promised not to put Big Jim off if that land goes into his hands. I dunno how things is coming out."

"Maybe we'll know more about how they're coming out to-morrow," said Jeffrey grimly. "I'll come in and talk it over with you then, anyway."

"And I hope you'll feel more talkative than you did to-day," said Rose.

Jeffrey drove off, laughing, but the

laughter died quickly. There was work to be done now; work as fine and delicate as the repairing of a watch. During these past six weeks he had been occupied merely with taming a gang of roughnecks to eat out of his hand, with building a village, and with keeping his business strictly to himself without antagonizing anybody. Now he was faced by a real job.

He drove slowly back to his village. Since the beginning he had lived there, going to Valeboro only to buy supplies or transact other business. He put his car into a neat shed which he used as a garage and started for the two-room cottage he had ordered built for himself. Zeke Blungy met him; and Zeke nursed, with many cuss words, a blood-stained hand.

"What's the matter?" asked Jeffrey. More than once prowlers from Stovepipe City had been discovered and driven off and every time there had been a fight. Big Mack had sent promises of vengeance to the outlander who had stretched him in the dust. Among other things he had said that he was going to chew off one or both of Jeffrey's ears. Zeke Blungy looked as though he had just connected with somebody from Stovepipe City.

"Why, that sawed-off dishwasher, Runty Whipple, bit me!" cried Zeke, with vast indignation. "Bit me! What do you think of that? If he had a peanut shuck for a head his brains would rattle around inside of it, and he bit me, Zeke Blungy!"

By a mighty effort Drake kept his face straight. The dignity of the patriarch of Bildad must not be trifled with.

"What made him bite you?" he asked.

"Jest because I cuffed him up to a peak, and knocked the peak off!" exclaimed Blungy. "I saw him whispering with Ferguson Slater. I don't like Slater no better'n I do one of them hop-toads from Stovepipe City, so I cuffed Runty!"

"I hope you didn't damage him

much?" asked Jeffrey, with real anxiety.

"He's too little to bust up. What's the matter, Jeff? Anybody 'd think you liked Slater!"

"I WANT Runty to be in good shape for the party to-night."

"What party?" Zeke forgot his bitten hand as a true Bildad Roder would forget anything short of a broken neck at the mention of a party.

"I'm going to give the boys a cider festival and christening to-night. I've named the village Humoresque."

"Yew-mer-esk," repeated Blungy, slowly, seeking for light. "Furrin' ain't it?"

"You might translate it 'Joke-town,'" Jeffrey told him, with a grin.

"And you," announced Zeke, positively, "have got four aces up your sleeve!"

"Zeke," said Jeffrey, "I've got a hand of cards up my sleeve, but I don't know how good they are until I play them. I'm going to do that to-night. I want you to do something for me, and I want the rest of the boys to do something. It's mainly up to you personally. Orders must be obeyed to the letter. No drunks. No arguments. There's more than a party going to happen and everything must move like clockwork. If you'll help me see it through, that bonus I promised will be something to make your eyes pop. To-night means success or failure for me on this job."

Zeke Blungy looked away, scratched, snorted, and coughed. Then he swore, as a safety valve lets off steam. He acted as though he had smoke in his eyes.

"I'm a sentimental cuss, Jeff," he said. "Whatever you say goes, and I ain't too feeble to lick the man that tries to lay down on ye! Fur as I'm concerned you can take your ding-busted bonus and feed it to a stranger's dog! I aim to see you through on account of your being a regular feller!"

Jeff put out his hand, and he felt as though he had smoke in his eyes, too.

"Have the boys get all set before dark. I want everything cleaned up and everybody ready to march right after supper. We're going down to a pine grove near Stovepipe City. Ommidy Bashaw is there now, standing guard over the refreshments with a double-barreled shotgun."

"So that's where Ommidy went!" exclaimed Blungy. "And me cussing him behind his back for sneaking off! Well, you picked a good man!"

Drake had indeed picked a good man. Ommidy was as wild as his name. He feared nothing on two legs or four and if any one disturbed him this night he would fill the disturber full of bird-shot first and ask questions afterward.

"Ommidy's the man for the job he's got," said Jeffrey. "I hope everybody else will do as well!"

CHAPTER V.

A BILDAD ROAD PARTY.

UNDER a bright moon Jeffrey Drake led his cohorts from Joke-town to the south and west until he reached a growth of white pine where the ground was carpeted with needles and a man could stretch out in comfort. Bashaw had helped him pick this spot without knowing that the night held promise of more than a cider party.

There was no fire, but a half dozen lanterns surrounded a barrel of cider, and a mound of tin cups rose beside it. When every cup was filled, Jeffrey called to one side Zeke, Bashaw, and one Woodchuck Huggins, a good woodsman and a first-class fighting man.

"Woodchuck," he said, glancing at his watch, "I want you to go over to Stovepipe City and report back to me here just as quick as you see Big Mack and his gang leave there. They'll be going soon now. There's going to be

a little rumpus to-night, I think. I'm taking you for this particular job because I know you won't get caught. But if you do, you're able to fight your way clear and get back here. I've got to know when Big Mack starts.

"Ommidy," continued Jeffrey, "your work is to go back to our village and stand guard until we get there. Unless something goes wrong with my plans you won't have a thing to do, but I want to be on the safe side. You'll be in on most of the fun. I can promise you that."

With suppressed whoops of joy Huggins vanished in one direction and Bashaw in another. More than one Bildad Roader had encountered the maul-like fists and hobnailed shoes of Big Jim Mack.

"Come back to the crowd, Zeke," said Drake. "We'll keep things together until Woodchuck gets back."

From Blungy the words had gone out that big things were going to happen before morning. Therefore it was an excited but hushed celebration that went on in the pine grove while Jeffrey waited for his scout. Too much noise might go down the breeze to Stovepipe City and give warning.

While he waited, Jeffrey, for the first time, outlined his entire plan to Blungy. Zeke had taken a fresh chew and his jaws moved faster and faster as the details unfolded. Drake had barely finished when Woodchuck came out of the brush at the edge of the pines. He was breathing hard.

"Big Mack has took every man in the village and started up toward the village!" he exclaimed. "And say! Runty Whipple's with 'em! If I could of got my hands on him—"

"Woodchuck," interrupted Jeffrey, "things are going fine! Come over to the cider barrel! I'm going to make a speech!"

"Now," muttered Zeke, "I'm glad I lived through the winter!"

"Boys," said Drake, when he had the attention of the men, "Zeke is go-

ing to take you on a little trip. He'll explain just what's to be done. It's a polite party now but it may not be later on to-night. I wish I could be with you for the next hour or so, but I can't. I've got to go and enjoy a joke. But I'll be in on the ructions when they start, if they do, and I'll be with you for the big laugh."

CHAPTER VI.

THE BATTLE OF STOVEPIPE CITY.

A CONSIDERABLE time later that evening Jeffrey Drake knelt in the darkness of the little attic space left between ceiling and roof of his Joketown cottage. Through an open window in one of the gable ends he watched the square in the center of the village.

By crawling back a few feet he could look down into the larger of the two rooms below. An opening had been left in the ceiling so that the attic could be used for storage purposes and now the board cover of the opening was pushed an inch or two to one side.

The street was well illuminated. Lanterns hung out before every house but about the buildings no creature moved. There were lights in many of the windows, however, and while Jeffrey watched a door opened in the cottage opposite. It opened halfway, and then slammed hastily as though the occupant of the house were afraid to come out. Somewhere a dog barked. A muffled wail drifted into the night. In the rooms below Drake heard furtive movements. He smiled.

Suddenly the air was rent by a yell from many throats. The blood tingled in Jeffrey's veins; he felt as though the hair were rising along the back of his neck. The rush of heavily shod feet swelled in volume. It came to a thundering climax in the square. The army of Stovepipe City had descended upon Joketown.

Slinking in the shadows Drake saw the tall form of Ferguson Slater. Runty Whipple skittered after him. Above the seething horde in the square towered Big Jim Mack. He lifted his face to the night skies and bellowed defiance, like some antediluvian monster come up from the marshes to challenge the world. The others milled about him, finding no one upon whom to visit their wrath. Runty dashed out from somewhere and seized Big Mack by the arm.

"That house right in front of ye is where Drake lives," he cried, above the bedlam. "They's a light there now!"

Even as Big Mack charged, Whipple disappeared again. The Stovepipe City leader hurled himself at the door. It slammed across the room. A woman's scream pierced the clamor. Jeffrey crept to the opening in the ceiling and looked down.

Big Mack was standing with his enormous jaw wagging as though it were unhinged. Pressed against the wall before him was a woman who, well fed and groomed, might have been pretty. Now she was too terrified to think of anything but danger from the giant form that loomed in front of her. For this was Mrs. Big Jim Mack, and she knew the weight of the wrath of Big Jim.

"I couldn't help it, Mack!" she wailed. "None of us could! They jest come and got us, them Bildad Roaders! All of us, women and younguns, dogs and cats! They even brought along a litter of kittens!"

The face of Big Mack underwent a series of changes which would have been astounding under any other circumstances. At first he was stupefied, then unable to believe his own eyes, and then baffled and furious.

"You mean to tell me everybody's been moved up here?" he roared.

"Everybody!" she cried. "And locked in! They told us not to dast put our noses outdoors! Look and see for yourself! Ain't you been to the

other houses? The famblies is scattered all around!"

Mack turned and tore out of the cottage. The press of men about the door broke and ran with him. They flung themselves at the other buildings. The night filled with cries, the wailing of children, the oaths of men.

It was time for Jeffrey Drake to go away. He climbed out of the window, hung by his hands, and dropped. As he turned to run he bumped into a big citizen of Stovepipe City. They rebounded.

"Hey, Mack! Here's one of 'em—"

THAT call to the pack was not finished. Jeffrey drove his fist straight and true and it sank in above the belt. He did not stop running until he plunged into the bushes where his car was hidden, well down the woodroad. In the seat a dark form stirred and straightened up.

"Is that you, Runty?" called Drake, in a low voice.

"I dunno if it's me or not," replied the cook's assistant. "I ain't got my nerves onsnazzled yet."

"We'll find out who you are later," said Jeffrey, with a breathless laugh. The engine hummed and the roadster headed through the bushes, out of concealment. It went down the woodroad faster than it had ever gone that way before.

For the first time since his first day in the mountains Jeffrey drove straight into Stovepipe City. With Runty at his heels he leaped out and went to meet Zeke Blungy.

"Things is fine here," said Zeke. "How is they in Joketown?"

"Excellent!" replied Jeff. "Runty Whipple has done a noble piece of work, even if he did bite you. I worked out the plot and Runty did the acting. He offered to help Slater clean us out, alleging certain grievances such as peeling too many potatoes, after Slater had tried to use him as a spy. We were supposed to be drunk to-night, celebrat-

ing. The idea was to jump us after we'd got so we couldn't fight. Runty kept Big Mack's gang herded in the woods above the village until he reported that there were no signs of life. And then finally he led the legions of the enemy to the biggest surprise they ever had! I didn't have much chance to talk with you, Zeke, when you escorted the women and children up to Coon Mountain, but I judge from what Mrs. Big Jim Mack said to her husband that we've made a perfect score."

"We done so," replied Zeke, solemnly, "although they's a lot of wounded. Ommidy Bashaw had some of his mustache pulled out by a female that was upsot, and Tugboat Smith was clawed by an old cat when he moved her litter of kittens. Also they's others bit, scratched, and kicked in the shins."

The crash of axes came from nearly every part of Stovepipe City. A great bonfire gave the men light to work. Scraps of lumber, chicken coops, dog kennels, doors, everything movable was being broken up and heaped between the shacks. The work was nearly finished. A blaze sprang up in one of the buildings. The window of another glowed. In half an hour Stovepipe City would be no more than a black spot in the forest.

That moment of triumph and congratulation was short-lived for the Bidad Roaders. It was not far, straight through the woods, from Joketown to Stovepipe City; and wrath had loaned wings to the feet of Big Jim Mack and his men.

Like the wolf on the fold they came down from Coon Mountain and hurled themselves, frothing, upon the Bidad Roaders, who were just beginning to admire the streamers of flame that licked the night. They struck like an avalanche, they rolled over the sturdy sons of Crowquill, and in half a minute two score private and personal fights were going on in the light of burning Stovepipe City.

Jeffrey found himself confronted by

a stranger who swung a blow that would have ended the affair if it had landed. Drake let it go over his head. Then he outboxed his man; he tied him up in knots and slammed him on the jaw so hard that he sat down and forgot to get up.

The next instant a length of stove-wood struck Jeffrey and sent him reeling twenty feet. He brought up, half dazed, in the immediate vicinity of Big Mack, who was earnestly engaged in hammering Woodchuck Huggins while two other Bildaders tried in vain to close with the giant.

JEFFREY'S head was singing, but he felt the call of duty toward that fracas. Moreover, he had long cherished a desire to find out what it was like to have a battle with Big Jim Mack. It would probably be much the same as pounding dynamite with a hammer, but he wanted to try it.

He pushed one of his own men out of the way and punched Big Mack in the short ribs with all he had in him. It seemed as though he had hit an iron-bound cask, but that blow was the deciding factor in the battle. The half-demolished Woodchuck closed with the other two. Mack and the three went down; and Jeffrey, moved to indiscretion by the tingle of victory, hurled himself into the mess for good measure.

The men rolled and clawed at each other, and tried to gouge and bite. Drake alone used his fists. Somebody punched him somewhere, and he saw a million sparks not from Stovepipe City. Then he found himself staggering up and trying to hold the spinning earth under his feet. Zeke Blungy was sitting on the neck of Big Mack and plugging his mouth with a hat so that he couldn't bite. There were two men to each leg and one to each arm.

Jeffrey looked around. With the leader down, the Stovepipe City army was melting. It bore back toward the woods, fighting a rearguard action. Some of the disabled were crawling in

that direction. The yells of the Bildad Roaders rose joyously as they chased their ancient enemies through the brush.

They let Big Jim Mack sit up. He was much, but not permanently, damaged. It was the first time, to the knowledge of Bildad Road or Coon Mountain, that he had been licked. He felt of a slightly masticated ear, and then of his ribs. He looked around. His gaze traveled from the whiskered face of Zeke Blungy to the battered countenance of Jeffrey.

"I'd rather," he said, "fight a catamount!"

"Thanks!" Drake managed to laugh in spite of a split lip, a half closed eye, and the tweet-tweet of little birds in his head. "If you'll go home, Mack, we'll never have any more trouble!"

"Home?"

"Where your family is, of course! Don't you want to live there?"

Big Jim Mack began to think this over. While he was thinking, a mighty scuffling of feet drew near; the scuffling was broken by a couple of solid thumps and a yell. Jeffrey turned. Ommidy Bashaw was dragging Ferguson Slater to the conference. Behind them came Runty Whipple, carrying Slater's shotgun and listening to Slater's opinion of him.

"What," demanded Big Mack ominously, "be you going to do now, you long-legged sneak? I ain't seen you doing any fighting to-night! What you done, anyway? Double crossed me? Where's my money for holding the railroad company up? Where's the pay for making the women and young-uns bawl for Lige Truman so he'd let us stay here?"

"Lige would of had to come through to-morrow!" frothed Slater. "The mortgage's due! If this pint-sized scullion hadn't tricked me—"

"If he hadn't tricked you, Big Mack would have been out of luck, wouldn't he?" cried Jeffrey. "You thought I'd get out warrants for him

and his men after you'd kidded him into raiding us! Mack couldn't collect from you if he was in jail, could he? You intended to get the right of way from Truman and soak the railroad company and take all the money!"

Big Jim Mack tried earnestly to get up. It took the best efforts of the five men who were holding him to prevent the total destruction of Ferguson Slater.

"Mack," said Jeffrey, when things had quieted a little, "deeds conveying every plot and building in the new village are already made out in Valeboro. If you say the word, you and I will write in the names to-morrow, or to-day. It's getting on toward daylight. What do you say?"

"So that's what it was for!" cried Slater.

"That's what the village was built for," replied Jeffrey, with a grin. "But I thought I'd move Mack first and talk it over with him afterward!"

"I'll take them deeds!" yelled Big Jim. "We'll be more neighborly-like to Slater, up there by Coon Mountain. It ain't very far to Crowquill!"

"I'll sue the company for maintaining a nuisance!" shouted Slater.

"If you make any more trouble you'll have to explain why you shoot at automobiles!" announced Drake firmly. "I found an empty shell in the woods that day you took a shot at me to help scare me out of the mountains. And I took a loaded shell out of your pocket right afterward. They're the same make and gauge! Both carried black powder and buckshot! Now, are you through, Ferguson?"

CHAPTER VII.

TO THE VICTOR—

ROSE TRUMAN was just frying the breakfast bacon and eggs when Jeffrey knocked at the kitchen door. She let him in, to meet an aroma

calculated to make a hungry man weep. He sniffed at the coffee pot and tried to look pathetic.

"What," she gasped, "has happened to your face? Is that what got you up at sunrise?"

"I have come," said Jeffrey, solemnly, "to buy the right of way. The deed is ready at Valeboro. I'll drive you over any time to-day, Mr. Truman."

"Hey?" exclaimed Lige, bewildered. "I explained how it was, Jeff."

"Big Mack has changed his mind."

"What's that? He ain't going to move?"

"He moved last night and he's very comfortable in his new quarters."

"What? Where? I don't care where it is, he'll want to go back! Them women 'll squall and Big Mack 'll get homesick—"

"He can't," said Jeffrey. "There's no 'back' to go to. Stovepipe City has burned." He went on to explain.

"Well, I'm dum-swizzled!" said Lige.

"So," murmured Rose, "is Ferguson Slater."

"He is," agreed Jeffrey. "Will you sell, Mr. Truman?"

"Call me 'Lige,' my boy," said the old man. "I ain't done nothing to you to make you so polite, have I? I'll go sign them deeds to-day, and durned glad to do it, as long as my conscience is easy about them poor critters in Stovepipe City."

"And," continued Jeffrey, with soaring spirits, "will Rose Truman go with us to Valeboro? I shall need her before I can send my telegram to the company."

"Why do you need me?" she asked, with the color deepening in her cheeks. "What do I have to do with the telegram?"

"I want to say in that telegram," Jeffrey told her, "something like this: 'Squatters moved. Right of way and wife acquired. Taking vacation.'"

THE END.



"Who fights behind me? Allaho—Allaho—
Akhbar!"

By Allah Who Made Tigers

Sedition and intrigue menace the border of India, as the mullah Mir Mahommed and Frank West, of the secret service, match wits in a mountain cavern

By TALBOT MUNDY

Author of "Asoka's Alibi," "Ho For London Town!" etc.

LEADING UP TO THIS INSTALLMENT

FRANK WEST, who is telling the story, is a British secret agent in the border town of Peshawar, on India's northwest frontier, charged with the mission of discovering whether Winifred Orloff, guest of Colonel Wingate, is a Russian agent. West is enamored of her, and hopes she is innocent.

One misty night he is rashly walking in one of the outlying graveyards, when he is stopped by a Scotch sentry. Suddenly three outlaw hillmen surprise them, knock him down, kill the sentry, and carry him off.

He wakes up in the camp of Mir Mahommed, mullah, who is preaching the holy war that the Russians would like to see burst on India. Mir Mahommed had found West, abandoned when the outlaws were frightened. A letter from West's aunt, bearing an Arabic seal—bought in an English curio shop—achieves great importance from its mysteriousness, for the mullah cannot read it, nor could West's captors. The mullah boldly announces that it is from the Sharif of El-Kalil, telling a vision in which he saw the mullah dead and a saint, reappearing

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to lead his Pathans, to great victories. The three robbers, Suliman, Ismail, and Ali bin Adam, are greatly impressed; but Ali, who hates West especially for a blow he dealt Ali while they were capturing him, goes away raging because the mullah will not surrender the Englishman.

The mullah's wife, Louise, an American negress, gets West to write a letter to Grabowski, a Peshawar surgeon and friend of the hillmen. The mullah had once let Grabowski talk him into posing for a papier-mâché statue, contrary to the Moslem religious ban on reproducing human figures in art. The mullah now says that the statue's existence is hurting his influence, and he fears enemies may seize it; so he asks Grabowski to send it to him in a coffin or Moslem shroud.

West scribbles a note to the authorities, and sends it back to Peshawar hidden in his dog's collar. From hints Louise has dropped, he guesses there is some connection between Grabowski and Winifred, and he fears she is a spy.

The mullah and Louise kill a couple of goats, and bury the carcasses in West's clothes, leaving his blood-stained overcoat on the ground, then they and the mullah's men flee higher into the mountains. Suliman, Ismail and Ali bin Adam find the grave, as they were expected to do, and then pursue the mullah, hoping to kill him and seize the mysterious letter, thus destroying his claim to sainthood and the right to start his holy war. The mullah sets up a dummy, which the robbers shoot, then his ambushed men kill all but Ali, who is let escape to bear the news of the mullah's death. After that his appearances will seem supernatural.

They are encamped in a lofty cavern. West, feigning weakness, manages to lull Louise's suspicions and steals her automatic. The mullah returns at night, bringing two prisoners. They are Grabowski and Winifred!

She, getting West's note, begged the friend of the hillmen to use his influence to free West.

When he had delivered the papier-mâché statue to Mir Mahommed's men he secretly followed them, hoping to reach the mullah; but Winifred follows him, and, unknown to them both, an Army patrol trails them. The pair had just fallen into the hands of Mir Mahommed's men, when the soldiers appear. There is a fight, in which all the troopers are killed; and the two are brought as prisoners to the mullah's cave!

CHAPTER VI.

DEATH STALKS IN THE MULLAH'S CAVE.

MAY Heaven forbid that I should wander off into the realms of psychology, which I don't understand any more than any one else does; but it is necessary to explain a little in order to make clear what followed. We three—Winifred, Grabowski and I—were prisoners in the hands of a man who had shot down twelve British soldiers and their officer ruthlessly, if that word is not too mild. Mir Mahommed was a public enemy, a danger to all that border, a desperate rogue, and a man whom every educated instinct in us should have urged us to hold in horror. Actually we admired him.

But that was not all. Grabowski, although in love with Winifred, was furiously indignant with her and doing his courteous damndest to be polite. There were moments, I think, when he suspected her, although his suspicion was probably vague and he may have merely been exasperated by her having followed him. Or perhaps he was jealous of me.

But I knew that it was no regard for me that had brought Winifred Orloff out of bounds on the wildest frontier in the world. And she knew I

was aware of that. She knew I suspected her of being a spy. Louise was suspicious of all of us, and hovered near enough to prevent us from holding anything like intimate conversation; and the more I observed and reflected, the more I believed Louise to be the real key to the mystery.

Somebody—that much was definitely known—had supplied Mir Mahommed with money in the form of English bank notes, which had reached him in spite of the vigilance of almost countless spies. If Winifred was the agent through whom the money passed, there was still a bare chance that she had not known what she was doing. Possibly Louise had tricked her into it. But how?

It was impossible to imagine that Mir Mahommed could have lured that girl into acting as his secret agent. He was not even thinking about her. He appeared to have forgotten she was there. The only word he spoke for an hour was when he threw a firebrand at one of his sleeping men and curtly ordered him to pile on fuel. Mir Mahommed, I guessed, was himself the victim of far deeper schemers than himself—a puppet whose strings were pulled by agents of the Czar.

Besides, Winifred paid no attention to him, whereas she watched Louise continuously. Winifred was dressed in a tweed coat and skirt, wool stockings, a blouse opened at the neck, and a man's soiled Terai hat that she probably snatched from a peg as she ran from the bungalow.

It made her look boyish and a little younger than she was. It suited her sunburned hands and general air of having lived in the open all her life. But her good looks lay in character, not regularity of line, which made it easier to guess the nature of her thought than if she had been merely plastically pretty.

She did not appear to me to be in the least degree cowed by the savagery of her surroundings. I could detect in

her no physical fear whatever; but I judged her to be horribly afraid of an intangible—of something she did not understand—of something that perhaps she did not wish to understand, and that she wished by hook or crook to prevent Grabowski from discovering. It seemed to me that she loved Grabowski and feared what he might find out about her.

Louise hovered around us in the shadowy background, watching, until at last she built a small fire near us and set coffee on to boil. That awoke Mir Mahommed out of his brown study.

ALLAH!" he exclaimed. "God's ways are wonderful and hard to understand. Nevertheless, it is given to me in part to understand them."

"It is easier to understand the British," said Grabowski. "They will send troops. When they find the bodies of those men you slew they will waste no time theorizing."

Suddenly the mullah stood up, setting the fire between us and himself; thus his back was toward the cavern entrance and the light shone on his fierce face, gleaming on his eyes and on his teeth that flashed amid the blackness of his beard like the fangs of a great animal at bay.

"If it is his will, let the troops come! It will also be his will that I shall defeat them. This earth is but an anvil of the Most High, whereon a man's soul is forged until it is fit for Paradise. How often, and how often is it Allah's will that a man's mercy shall be as a snare for his own feet! His generosity a pitfall! If I had slain that man"—he pointed at me; I felt almost guilty—"this had not happened. But for you"—he stared at Grabowski—"that cursed image never would have been made, compelling me to act, as it now appears, too soon. It has been a poisonous barbed weapon in the hands of my accusers. Neverthe-

less, it shall be they who are undone. It shall be I who triumph, lest it be said that his servant was forgotten by Allah—on whose Prophet's head be blessings through all eternity, and on whose loyal sons let wisdom fall like dew on the ripening grain!"

The fire spat applause as the coffee boiled over. Louise made magic until the affluent aroma of her caldron filled our part of the cavern and thought thrummed on another vibration. She served the wondrous stuff in tin mugs. Mir Mahommed gulped his. It burned his mouth. He squirted it into the fire and demanded more with an oath that suggested earthquakes.

"How soon will you let us go?" asked Winifred, in English. "You have killed quite a number of innocent men—"

"*Wallah!* Would they not have slain me?"

She glanced at Grabowski, who was known in all that countryside as Mir Mahommed's friend. But that glance was intended to deceive me, and I knew it; it was intended to hide from me the personal meaning of her next words.

"Is it thus, Mir Mahommed, that you repay favors? Have you received nothing, that you feel you owe us nothing?"

"Tooth for a tooth—gift for a gift," said Mir Mahommed scornfully. "Do you want more coffee?"

He strode away and stood glowering out at the night with his hands behind him. Louise gathered up the coffee mugs and was about to speak, but Winifred, with no more than a gesture to Grabowski and me, got up and stood beside the mullah in the cavern entrance. Grabowski went and sat near them on a lump of rock, to keep her, so to speak, in countenance; no Moslem ever entirely understands the frankly equal, unsex-conscious challenge of the modern woman.

Mir Mahommed glanced at Grabowski and seemed to be glad he was close

at hand. But it was obvious enough to me that Grabowski's nearness prevented Winifred from saying to the mullah what she had intended. Louise came and sat beside me, sharing the same mat beside the fire.

"Honey," she said, "you don't know how to manage that girl." She took it for granted that I was hopelessly in love—I suppose because I had been watching Winifred's face so intently. "You should treat her the way Mir Mahommed treats a woman."

It is a good rule not to correct your opponent's errors, since one error begets the next, so I said I was interested at the moment in getting Winifred safely back to Peshawar—that and nothing else.

"AND in Peshawar, what? Honey, she'll give you the go-by in Peshawar. You're not ruthless. Listen: you can have her. Mir Mahommed goes his own way, and if I can't follow he wouldn't wait to bury me; but if I should ask him not to let that girl go—if I should say I'm lonely and I want her to be friends and to quarrel with, he'd give her to me just as quick and ruthless as he'd cut your throat if I told him you'd done me an insult. I'll keep her up here in the hills for awhile, and these old hills will tame her mighty quick. But you and I have to understand each other, honey."

Craving to understand—but not at all to be understood—I encouraged her to talk on.

"Mir Mahommed," she said, "knows a thousand shifts, and if the troops come before he's ready he'll soon put a range of mountains between us and them. I know him, honey. We are as likely as not to be fifty miles from here this time to-morrow; he and I know caverns in the mountains where an eagle couldn't find us. You and she shall come—I'll see to 'it. Grabowski is in the way. I can tell Mir Mahommed to let Grabowski go back to Peshawar. He can take a let-

ter saying what will happen to you two if the troops aren't called off. But you must persuade Grabowski to go with the letter; he'll need powerful argument."

"Why not let Winifred go?" I suggested. "That way, you'll make friends for yourself—friends you may need later on. You can hold Grabowski and me for ransom and no particular harm done."

I was on the edge of learning something. Louise was about to answer, and her eyes foreboded revelation; but Mir Mahommed turned in the entrance and gruffly commanded her to heap fuel on the fire. He ordered me against the wall where Winifred had sat with Grabowski when they were first brought in.

Winifred and Grabowski joined me just in time to get out of the way of fifty hard-breathing *Pathans* who came swarming into the cavern, treading on each other's heels. They were armed to the teeth, the greater part of them with stolen army rifles, but some with jezails and a few with only iron-studded shields and tulwars—the latter men being the most dangerous, because they would risk anything to be armed as the others were.

They were smelly with sweat and with the damp night air on their sheep-skin jackets; they were fierce-eyed—hungry with imagination—silent with expectancy.

They eyed the mullah as the wolves look at a strong wolf who can lead them to the kill, with no more loyalty than wolves have and no hint of mercy for the man who fails. The mullah returned insolence for insolence, in double measure:

"Laggards! Were you afraid to leave your women? Are they such loose wantons that ye could not trust them out of sight?"

The newcomers crowded around the fire, some sprawling, others sitting up-

right and a few men muttering to each other as if afraid of the leaping shadows that might conceal evil spirits summoned by the mullah to undo their faith in God. Their glances confirmed the common rumor that Mir Mahommed had a reputation for black magic. Some of them dreaded the magic more than him. Some grinned with grudging admiration.

Winifred whispered to me: "I want to talk to you—alone—where we can't be overheard. The mullah might let me go, but I'm afraid to go. I want to tell you why."

Grabowski laughed—one of his deep ones that sound like something popping at the bottom of a well.

"This is a nice, tough nut for the *burra sahib!** Can't you hear him cursing while he writes a minute in his journal in red ink! I'll bet the pen goes through the paper. If he doesn't send troops to rescue us, every hillman south of Kabul will laugh and go immediately into the hostage-bagging business. If he does send troops, it probably means the lives of fifty or a hundred men. No matter which way he decides he'll get a wiggling from the Viceroy in Council. And, ho for the ha'penny papers! 'Niece of English Officer Ravished by Savage Hillmen on Northwest Frontier While Authorities Look Idly On!' And then questions in Parliament: 'Is the Secretary of State for India aware that the Indian government's policy of blockade and brutality on the Northwest frontier is likely to cause the sacrifice of hundreds of innocent lives and prodigious sums of money?' Hell or high commissioner—you pay your excellent intention and you take your choice!"

IT was one of those so-called psychological moments—Winifred on the verge of tears and Grabowski trying to be cynical to hide emotion. I struck swiftly and hard—and hooked my fish!

* High commissioner.

"Are you guilty?" I asked Winifred. "Or did you blunder?"

"I made a fool of myself—and got in deeper and deeper. Now I'm done for."

"Is it Louise?" I asked.

She nodded. Grabowski was talking away, listening to his own voice, sneering at his own lame jokes; he did not even suspect that she and I were whispering. But I saw Louise watching us.

"Do you love Grabowski?" I asked.

"Do you want him?"

She nodded again. "But I've lost him."

"Do you want him?"

"Yes."

"Is he innocent?"

"He knows nothing. He isn't even suspicious. But when he finds out—"

"If you'll promise to come clean—tell me everything—I will do what I can."

"I told you: I want to talk to you alone."

"Will you tell everything?"

"Yes."

"Whatever happens? Here or in Peshawar?"

"Yes, I promise."

It appeared to me that there was something I could do that minute. I made my way over to Mir Mahommed, where he stood staring through the cavern mouth at Jupiter blazing brightly over banks of mist that wreathed the summits of the hills.

"*Hajji*," I said, considering it wiser to address him by his honorable title, "should a man shoot three times if one bullet is enough?"

"Nay, once," he answered.

"And in the matter of a loan: should a man demand three times its value for security?"

"Nay, nay," he said, "that would be as bad as usury, which is a foul sin for which men's souls pay bitterly and forever."

"Then one hostage is ample," I told him. "Keep me. I have precedence, having been the first to fall into your

hands. Act reasonably in the sight of Allah and all honorable men by releasing those others. Let them go back to Peshawar."

He nodded, stroking at his beard, but there was mocking laughter in his eyes, which I thought to change, nevertheless, by argument.

"It is enough for you to threaten to slay one prisoner. The troops would make terms."

"You and he may go then. I will keep the woman," he said curtly.

I had presence of mind enough to turn away. He had not sworn by any of the nine-and-ninety names of God, so he might reverse that decision without loss of self-respect; and there had been laughter in his eyes. I made haste before laughter should turn into anger. But as I turned I noticed that Louise was lurking in the shadow. She had heard. It might be that the mullah's eyes had answered her unspoken thought.

"God pity me," I said when I returned to Winifred, "I've cooked our goose. I mean, I've cooked yours." I related what had happened. Grabowski let a laugh come rumbling up from somewhere near his heels.

"Excellent!" he said. "When fortune comes rotten end foremost, it can't grow worse, and it may grow better. Watch Mir Mahommed." He threw an arm around Winifred, suddenly sure of himself again and full of love for her.

MIR MAHOMMED stiffened himself like a wolf with its scruff raised. In the shadowy entrance the firelight touched a rifle barrel and the hilt of some one's tulwar. Once or twice I saw a man's eyes glittering, but Louise stood close beside Mir Mahommed and the owner of the eyes was screened from view. He spoke in very low tones.

Presently another fifty or sixty men came trooping in, most of them less well armed than the first contingent,

but more smelly, presumably having come a greater distance. They were hungry and, though they carried goat-skin bags and stolen British army haversacks full of provisions for perhaps a week, they grumbled noisily because no banquet was spread ready for them.

Mir Mahommed dismissed the man with whom he was speaking; the fellow went away into the darkness coughing like a sick sheep, but moving rapidly, if one could judge by sound with all those tricky echoes. Mir Mahommed studied the hundred men who crowded around the fire, then suddenly filled his lungs and let them know their captain's name.

"Ye know me. By the nine-and-ninety names of God, I know you! In the name of the Prophet, on whose head be blessings, I have summoned you to earn eternal life. And by Allah who made tigers, it is I who lead you. Deny my leadership and learn whose sword I wield!—the sword of the avenger!—of the Prophet of the God of life and death! Deny me and I will curse your souls into the stinking pits of torment—in the name of the Most High and his Prophet, on whose head be praise! But he who follows me shall go the way that I take, to eternal life—and doubly, aye, tenfold is he blessed who dieth in the battle against unbelievers! I have spoken."

Suddenly Grabowski spoke up—astonishment seizing a hundred men so sharply that their breath came like the sound that hail makes when it cuts into the standing corn.

"Lend me a tulwar, Mir Mahommed. I deny your leadership. Stand forth and fight me before these witnesses. Let Allah judge between us."

Winifred clutched Grabowski's arm, but I checked her—not that I wanted to see Grabowski take that chance. I knew the mullah would refuse to fight him. He was under no obligation to take up a prisoner's challenge. He would have been a fool to do it; Gra-

bowski's skill with a tulwar was notorious.

Mir Mahommed's eyes glowed, facing a new perplexity with anger, but indomitable courage. Rather than not he would have taken up that challenge; he even leaned his rifle against the wall and his fingers gripped at the hilt of his tulwar so fiercely that Winifred unconsciously seized my hand and dug her nails into it.

But he understood Grabowski's motive; let him refuse to fight, and his men might call him a coward. Let him fight and lose—his force would scatter. Let him fight and win—even so, his men might accuse him of lacking dignity. That was a bold bid of Grabowski's—generous and rash. The mullah's simplest answer would be to shoot all three of us, and he could have forced his men to share that guilt as onlookers and consequently parties to it. He could hold it over them, to make them fight more desperately if British troops should come.

"Ye have eaten my salt," he said after a moment. "Though ye three are prisoners, ye are also guests."

There was silence for about three minutes—then the sound of hurrying footsteps on the ledge outside the cavern. Cursing and hard breathing. A challenge. In came fourteen of the mullah's men, including Feisal and Abdul beni Rahman, who had carried the letter I wrote to Grabowski. They were surly and dog-weary. They dumped at Mir Mahommed's feet a thing so like a corpse in its burial shroud that a murmur arose in the cavern. Mir Mahommed glared across it at Grabowski.

"Fight me that!" he said tartly. "You raised it out of hell to mock my unwise tolerance of western ways." Spittle of scorn was on his lips, but his eyes looked grateful for the chance to set aside Grabowski's challenge without relying too much on that rather specious excuse of hospitality. He turned on Feisal and the other thirteen, lashing himself now into a fury that

was too convenient to be altogether genuine.

"Allah! Is this obedience? Ye were to have buried that up-valley in the grave made ready for it. Death of a hundred thousand dogs! What now?"

"**W**E have done our best," said Feisal. "That thing is accursed. Devils follow it and mock us! Lo, we bore it up the valley and the grave was ready. There were many who came to observe, and to them we said, with proper respect for the valiant dead, that this is the body of Mir Mahommed killed by a bullet after he had slain ten Highlanders. It was well. There were some who grieved and some who sighed good riddance, and there was none to deny your honor's sainthood—until Ali bin Adam came clambering down a hillside hugging an arm that hurt him as if red-hot iron was bedded in it. A blasphemously angry man was Ali, filled to the teeth with bitter speech."

"Shall a wet cat such as Ali change the will of God?" demanded Mir Mahommed. "Ran ye from Ali—who sighed-for-a-shirt?"

"By Allah, not we! But he told of this cavern, and of a dummy dressed up to resemble your honor, shot at by himself and others because of a feud between you. And he said, so devilishly was the dummy fashioned that even he believed it was your honor's self until it fell and he saw the string attached to it. Then he told how his friends were slain by your honor's men laying in wait, and how he ran, and was shot in the arm, and that he was now on his way to Peshawar to beg treatment from the British *dakitari* in the *harsipittal*. Then Ali made haste on his way because the hurt was paining him as if a thousand devils gnawed to reach the marrow of his arm. But before he went he swore he had followed Mir Mahommed all night long, and had seen him alive, not dead, so that this is sorcery of some kind."

"Who would believe Ali bin Adam?" asked Mir Mahommed.

"No man, surely, without writings and a thousand witnesses—and even so with grave doubt. But there were more than a hundred men who came to watch that burying. And they said: 'Are we blind or do our eyes know Mir Mahommed's face? So let us look and our eyes shall answer whether Ali tells truth or otherwise.' And could we fourteen have prevented them? By Allah—how? Is my throat hoarse? It is from arguing that none should defile with his unwashed hands the shroud of such a saint as Mir Mahommed. Lo, they sent their women to bring water, making their hands clean. *Wallah!* What could I do? I could call them jackals and grave robbers. I could curse them by the nine-and-ninety names. I could say—and lo, I did say—what Allah put into my mind concerning their wives and their mothers and their sons' grandsons. But it all availed nothing. They commanded me to stand aside and they would look. So I got thence, and these others also, bringing the thing with us. At our backs was laughter, some shouting one thing and some another; but most of them shouted that Mir Mahommed must be up to his tricks again."

"God's ways are wonderful," said Mir Mahommed. "Lo, a man's sin mocks him though he run from it to Kandahar! Am I doomed to live forever with that cursed image that I foolishly let a man make?"

Winifred whispered to me: "Can't you say something to make those hill-men burn that thing?"

"Eh, what's that?" Grabowski asked her. "Don't you know that to burn it would be, according to their superstition, the same thing as condemning him to hell?"

All eyes were on Mir Mahommed. I was probably the only one who saw Louise, behind him in shadow, whispering none knew what counsel in his ear. But I could guess.

"What came through this time?" I asked as soon as I was sure Grabowski was not listening. "Money?"

"I don't know."

"Instructions? Advice? Promises?"

"I don't know."

"Don't you ever know?"

"Only the first time—money for Louise. Ever since then he—they—have kept threatening exposure—denunciation unless I would keep on forwarding messages."

"How?"

THE fire in the midst of the cavern was dying down and deepening shadow, shot with crimson when the falling embers made a flame leap suddenly, cast a phantomlike appearance on every face. Bodies became almost invisible. The eyes of Mir Mahommed began to resemble a disembodied tiger's; nothing suggested that they belonged to a human being, except that the hand that held his rifle showed and now and then the firelight shone on the metal barrel and on the hilt of his tulwar. The wait, nigh breathless, for his words seemed endless. Winifred whispered her answer to me so low that I could not hear it, but Grabowski did.

"That image?" He let out one of his deep belly laughs. "*Mea maxima culpa!* All my own doing, and the damned thing has jinxed us all. I made it for a spiritual purpose—art—heart—same words if you understand 'em. But it was the devil who understood and used my image to send Mir Mahommed's plans down wind. Mir Mahommed's remedy won't be milk and water. There's blood in his eye."

There came another challenge on the ledge outside the cavern. It was answered by a long-drawn wail and there was shouting to and fro. A man ran in to get a fire brand to wave from the ledge and show the direction to somebody. More shouting. Winifred kept silence; all eyes were again on Mir Mahommed.

Suddenly the mullah's voice came booming like a sound from a sepulcher, hollow and startling: "I speak of God. There is no god but God. I swear there is no god but God, whose prophet is Mahommed!"

It broke the tension. The whole cavern full of ruffians began to chant in unison the magic phrases that make Islam one emotional entity that becomes a weapon of steel and fire and frenzy in the hands of him who understands it. There had been purpose in that long pause of his. He had them by the heartstrings now. They would excite themselves until no lesser sacrifice than unbelievers' blood would still them—blood and plunder! Our blood probably.

Grabowski leaned past Winifred, pitching his voice in a key that made it audible against the thunder of the Moslem chant:

"He expects bad news! There's some one coming. He knows it can't be good news. By God, he's desperate. He's afraid that statue will turn 'em against him unless he fills 'em full of anger against some one else. He'll throw us to the wolves, I expect. Me, anyhow. Why not? I made the statue."

He threw his left arm around Winifred again. I cursed him for it, and he let go, wondering; but I had no time to explain then that Louise was watching. I could not tell him how I was deceiving Louise about our relationships. I put my own arm around her, and Grabowski grinned like some one being photographed by the police.

Two men came into the cavern and the hundred-throated din of Allah's greatness ceased as suddenly as when the frogs cease croaking in a moonlit pond. The gloom within the cavern became one vast ear that listened. Aware of drama, the two messengers stood staring at the mullah and at each other.

"Praise Allah, speak!" commanded Mir Mahommed, his own iron nerves

so strained that he was hard put to it at last to behave with dignity.

But those two men were strangers to each other, come from different directions, sore-footed, sweating rival heralds of emergency. Both burst into speech at once.

"Devils of hell! What ears can listen to the clamor of two fools?" roared Mir Mahommed. "Silence, you! Speak, you!"

The man he indicated burst into his story: a shadow, a voice in darkness:

"**H**AJJ!—they come two hundred strong to throw you and your graven image from the cliffs! Making haste by all three trails, lest you escape them! On his way down-valley Ali bin Adam fell in with three of your honor's enemies. To them he told his story, saying you are in this cavern consulting spirits from hell with the aid of the woman they call the black she-devil! Your honor's enemies awoke the countryside. Run, Hajji! Escape below the border! Hide where no man knows you! There is no escape save southward; they are coming along all three trails to hurl you and your image from the cliff and burn your body before kites and vultures can tear it and become possessed in turn by devils! In the name of the Almighty, run while there is time!"

The echo of his voice had not ceased ringing in the cavern when the other man burst into speech.

"Run?" he exclaimed. "Run whither? In the name of God, what devil's work? *Hajji!* The troops come! Ali bin Adam fell in with a half-troop of the British Guides, and to them he told his story. God knows what tale he told! I know this: that he told them where this cavern lies amid the hills, and he showed them the hut of a border-thief who knows the way to it. They caught that thief and burned his hand with matches while their officers were not looking—burned him until he agreed to lead them hither. The

Guides made much signalling, and now the Scotchmen come! Scotchmen, *Hajji!* Scotchmen! The Guides hold every pass that a goat could clamber by. Two companies of Scotchmen come like witches of Eblis! Allah, but they swung their rumps up-valley! Now they climb and crawl, cursing every rock that hinders them from vengeance for the dozen men you slew. They come! At sunrise you shall see their bayonets!"

"By Allah! Heard ye that?" roared Mir Mahommed. He drew his tulwar. Some one threw dry wood on the fire and flame leaped to reveal him. He was splendid.

"By the word of the Prophet of God, who runs? Who fights behind me? *Allaho—Allaho—Akhbar!*" He swung his tulwar high; it thrummed with the heft he gave it. Then he began again that ritual that fuses Moslems into one hot hatred of opposition, no matter whence it comes. "I swear there is no god but God, whose prophet is Mahommed!"

Winifred tried to say something to me, but her words were engulfed in the uproar. I made signs to her that I would try to read her lips, but Mir Mahommed strode toward us. As he came the din rose in a wave of frenzy, hill-men leaping to their feet to howl at us the names of God and strike into us terror of the wrath to come. But Mir Mahommed knew the trick of making himself heard in any tumult, pitching his voice harshly off-key, speaking to Grabowski not much louder than was normal.

"It was you," he said in English, "you, who swore you are my friend, you who sent word for a troop of the Guides to follow you! *Wallah!* What friendship!"

Grabowski faced him, Winifred clutching his arm again, her young face etched with agony, while frantic men heaped fuel on the fire and the cavern seemed to sway and tremble with the vibrance of passion. Nevertheless, in

all that din Grabowski's voice was perfectly distinct because it was passionless and disconnected from the uproar—almost like a dream-voice:

"Mir Mahommed, you need no lies. You have a ground for quarrel, if you seek one. I made that image. It was I who claimed that favor after I saved your life—so *you* said—and you begged me to let you repay me in some way lest you should feel under too great obligation. Therefore it was I who caused much of this trouble. But as God is my witness, I had nothing to do with the coming of troops."

The mullah glared at Winifred. "*You* sent for them! My woman heard you say that Feranquesat here sent a message by his dog. You gave that message to an officer—"

I THOUGHT of Louise's pistol, but there was no sense in using that yet.

If I shot the mullah that would only loose from restraint a hundred savages, who would be egged on by the vengeful Louise. I did the only thing I could think of—thrusting Winifred aside and facing him, telling a bold lie bluntly:

"It was I who sent for troops. In the dog's collar there were two messages. One was to her, but the other was addressed to the General *bahadur* in Peshawar."

He stepped a full pace backward, hand on tulwar-hilt. Winifred tried to drag me away, but I resisted and Grabowski, with his eyes on Mir Mahommed's face, stepped in front of both of us. Mir Mahommed drew his tulwar halfway from the scabbard.

"Allah—"

But yet again the mystery of Allah's will prevented Mir Mahommed's purpose almost in mid-action. If his purpose was to kill me—as I think—that might have served him—might have whetted the edge of his men's savagery; they might have felt blood guilty along with him and so have been the more determined to fight with the last

cartridge to prove guilt was godliness. But dawn was creeping down the walls of the ravine and there was dim gray light and raw cold in the cavern entrance. Harsh—sudden—convincing came the cry of one of Mir Mahommed's watchmen on the ledge:

"In the name of Allah, make ready! Scotchmen come!"

CHAPTER VII.

"FORWARD, HIGHLANDERS!"

THEN Mir Mahommed showed his leadership, although his generalship may be called in question. His ruffians surged to the entrance; probably they meant to run. He drove them back. They turned and clamored for our lives, for having brought the makings of disaster down on them.

A hairy, handsome brute with yellow teeth, proposing to make short work of it, swung for my throat with a tulwar—a swipe that would have cut my head off as neatly as John the Baptist's. Mir Mahommed struck up his tulwar and sent it spinning against the cavern wall; the offender followed it, struck with a hilt that broke his teeth.

"My prisoners are mine!" roared Mir Mahommed. "By my blood, they live or die as I say!"

"A life for a life!" I said. "I owe you a life for that, Mir Mahommed." But he ignored me. With a gesture behind his back he brought Louise to us, she passing through the crowd with studied insolence, enjoying the hot savagery that lusted but dared not touch her. She was beautiful in their eyes and she knew it; there was a seductive suppleness about her movement that made those ruffians crave to have their hands on her and fight for her like helions—a lust like fulminate that touched off equally dangerous stuff in her. Her eyes looked hungrily at Winifred. She would be no more lonely.

"Come," she commanded, with a

nod of her head toward the darkness where the mules were stabled. But Mir Mahommed would have no haste; he chose to show his strength; he damned that spate and held it until every man in the cavern knew who was master.

"Hold!" he commanded. "Take that with you!" He pointed to Grabowski's papier-mâché statue lying like a cold corpse in its cotton shroud.

We had to pass down a lane between his men to reach it, and their foul breath was hot on our faces, but none laid a finger on us. Grabowski and I picked up the statue and carried it feet first as if it were clay that had come honestly by such imposing calm.

Its weight was not much, but my strength in proportion was less, so I carried my end of it with some expenditure of effort, and not many in that cavern understood yet what the thing was. They who bear away the dead go unmolested even in border warfare. Men shrank away from us; and they who did understand it was a statue held their tongues.

We laid it down within the opening of the inner cavern, where the mules, that could smell the dawn, were whimpering for breakfast; and Louise commanded us to go in out of sight and stay there. Some of that mood of insolence remained in her, blood surging in her arteries at thought of all that passion she had passed through, unscathed, but not unmoved.

She might as well have given orders to Grabowski's statue. We three turned in the gap to watch Mir Mahommed disciplining men to whom the very name of discipline was something unknown and incomprehensible. He imposed his iron will. They knew they were obeying, and they grew less sullen as that dawned on them, obedience being comfortable when rebellion has burned off and there is something desperate to be done. The more men resemble wolves, the more like sheep they are.

Mir Mahommed stood in the cavern

mouth and as they passed him one by one and two by two he blessed them in the name of the prophet who took Medina from the enemies of God. He went out, last of a group of headmen, ordering them how to deploy and maneuver their units. There appeared to be about one headman for every ten; he gave definite orders to each headman, as if he had long ago memorized every boulder of that grim valley with some such contingency as this in view.

HE did not glance at us. He left nobody to stand guard over us, perhaps because he did not trust his men to watch two women. He knew there was small risk of our escaping, as we discovered presently. But his leaving us there unguarded scared Louise. It was the one egregious mistake that he had made, unless that other one of letting me see him give the automatic pistol to Louise should be counted against him. I thrust the muzzle of it into her ear.

"Louise," I said, "I never killed a woman. I would rather not. Sit there. Sit down and answer me."

I told Grabowski to take Winifred out to the cavern entrance. Then I began to tear the wrappings off the statue.

"Louise," I said, "you may save yourself trouble if you save me time. Tell me where to look."

But she did not have to tell me. I wrenched at the cloth and the top part of the head of the image came loose; the turban was made separately, like a lid fitting down on the skull. There was a package inside the head. I pouched it.

Ragged firing had already filled the valley full of din, so I hurried outside to the ledge then, letting Louise follow or not as she chose. To the right, where the ledge curved around a buttress of the unscalable cliff, Mir Mahommed had left a strong contingent in command of his own man Feisal. Evidently they had orders not to waste a round of ammunition; they had built a

low stone rampart and crouched behind it, observing the fight in the valley below. "They appeared to serve three purposes—as a reserve that could be summoned instantly to any section of the firing line; as rear-guard, to defend the approach to the cavern, also the track leading down to the valley, against the two or three hundred hillmen reported to be hurrying to punish Mir Mahommed for his sins against creed and prejudice; and lastly, as a guard to prevent our escape.

Mir Mahommed was at war with time, between two enemies. His one imaginable chance of safety lay in beating off the Highlanders, then routing them. Then he must turn, if he could rally his men from the looting of dead and wounded, to defeat a greater number in his rear who would have the advantage of higher ground, although the pass through which the hillmen would have to come at him was narrow and well flanked with rocks that offered cover for defenders. It had a mean, unsheltered slope that could be bullet-swept against a too rash adversary. It was no place to defend against artillery, or even against a slow assault, but for Mir Mahommed's present purpose it was not ill-chosen.

Beneath us, thunderous with exploding echoes and already faintly hazy with the burned gas of smokeless powder, the valley lay spread in panorama.

Mir Mahommed held a naked ramp that had been formed by the fall of a side of a mountain into the ravine. It was the only possible means of access to the ledge, to the cavern and to the pass higher up. It was clear that the Highlanders meant to take that ramp by storm, perhaps because they had scant reserves of ammunition and were in no mood to retreat or wait for reinforcements.

From where we lay their helmets looked like an irregular string of oblong buttons, drawn in spasmodic movement toward the ramp by unseen violence at either end. They had no

machine gun, nor any force at the rear to cover their line of retreat, so probably the Guides held all the passes to the southward. They had made a receiving station for casualties among rocks on an island in the dried-up watercourse that wound along the valley bottom, marked by the red cross on the chests of medical supplies.

They appeared to be two full companies strong and to have brought two pipers to a company—not a man too many for the desperate work ahead.

SAID Grabowski in my ear: "They hope to pull this off so quickly that it can be described in dispatches as an ordinary border skirmish. They're probably commanded by a captain or a brevet-major hungry for promotion. And the men are hell-bent after revenge for all the sentries that have been cut up lately in the night, and for that dozen that Mir Mahommed slew when he captured Winifred and me. On top of that, their more or less civilized and thoroughly splendid Scotch imaginations are on fire at the thought of an officer's lady in the hands of hillmen. Virtue being at stake, there's going to be a most amazing vicious fight. All the same, by God, if we could get to them—who knows? They might call that a day's work, and we'd save fifty or sixty—maybe a hundred lives. Worth trying, anyhow."

His voice reached me between the crashing of the echoes that multiplied and repeated every rifle-shot, exaggerating the yells of Mir Mahommed's men until the winding valley was a sea of stuttering sound that broke against the cliff behind us and set up a moaning in the cavern mouth. Winifred heard no word of it. She laid a hand on my shoulder and spoke into my ear: "Do you know how? Can you save me?"

"Dammit!" Grabowski shouted, at my right hand. "Signal to them! No use simply waving—like a red rag to a bull, that. God! They'd wade in all

the harder. Make a flag, man—two flags—get me two sticks—I know the Morse stuff. Signal 'em to draw off and parley. Mir Mahommed has sense—he'll hand us over." He tore his shirt off—ripped it in two pieces. I brought two sticks from the cave where they kept the fuel. Grabowski tied his linen to the sticks and stood up.

"Zip!" A rifle bullet missed him by a hand's breadth. "Allah!" A stream of profanity reached us downwind. Feisal jerked his breech-block back and snapped another cartridge home, his right hand automatically then reaching for the empty shell. "Put those flags down! Death of a hundred thousand dogs! Get back into the cavern!"

We had to go. There was no sense in being shot for disobedience, at that stage of the game. Moreover, out of sight was out of mind; it gave us opportunity to plan some subtler move, although it was maddening to sit inside the cavern mouth where the noise flowed like a galloping mill-race and came echoing out again.

Louise was going calmly about her business making coffee. She had fed the mules and she asked Grabowski to carry water for them. He told her, with all the courtesy that he commands, to go to any sort of hell dictated by her erratic fancy. Then he fetched four coffee-mugs and made her fill them. As we drank, gasping between the hot gulps, I remembered.

"All right," I said to Louise. "Bring the bucket and we'll fetch water."

The bucket was back in the cave where the mules were tethered. Sending her to bring it gave me time to explain:

"There's a goat-track to the spring on the face of the cliff. I think the track continues downward. I think that's the way Mir Mahommed went on his way to get that statue. You take the bucket and bring back word. If yes, we'll all three try it. We can only die once."

So Grabowski made some gruff excuse about my injured head and went out with the bucket, shielding himself against the wall for a minute or two while he explained at the top of his lungs to Feisal that he only wanted to bring water for Louise. Feisal apparently gave permission, although in order to reach the spring Grabowski would need to pass out of Feisal's sight. True, Feisal could have watched him if he leaned over the ledge, but it was hardly likely that Feisal would take his eyes off the fighting for more than seconds at a time.

LOUISE walked over to where her own belongings lay in disorder and began thoughtfully to stuff them into a goat-skin bag. She appeared to consider the game was up, at least for the time being; she was making ready for retreat.

I did not doubt there was a bolt-hole somewhere, known perhaps only to her and Mir Mahommed; but that was their business, and I only hoped it was true, since I owed Mir Mahommed his life. I proposed to be careful not to learn too much. However, I opened the package that I had taken from the statue's head. Louise watched me.

"You may have that, honey. Keep it."

"That" was a thousand pounds in Bank of England five-pound notes negotiable almost anywhere on earth. I pushed them back into the envelope and drew out what I wanted—all I wanted—all that the Indian government needed—one half-sheet of paper signed with three initials underneath one type-written sentence:

No more money unless the overdue rising takes place, but plenty more if you keep your promises.

The initials were those of a Bombay merchant long under suspicion, but hitherto too wary to be trapped.

"Do you know who he is?" I asked Winifred.

"Yes."

"If I'm to protect you, look sharp and tell me all you know."

"I borrowed money from that man in Bombay. I had to, to reach Peshawar. The Wingates did not know how hard up I was. Nobody knew—except that man; he knew because I could not repay the money. Then he loaned me more. He said it would be all right, I could pay back later—after I married—any time. Then he came to Peshawar. He sat out a dance with me at Government House. He told me about a New York colored woman up here in the mountains—said he wished to get a letter to her without anybody knowing—said at first it was legal business, something about a legacy that she might lose if anybody learned what was going on. He said nobody would examine my mail. Would I act as go-between? How could I refuse? It was easy. I used to take the letters to the hospital along with comforts for any friendless hillmen who might be in there. Some of them were in with only trifling injuries. It was always one of those who took the letters to Louise."

"Then what?"

"He returned to Peshawar. He told me there was money for Louise and that I must deliver it. He said 'must.' I objected. So he told me the fact—that I had been delivering seditious messages to and fro. He pointed out that I had a Russian-sounding name, which would make it very difficult for me. No one would believe me innocent if I were denounced. He also demanded the money I owed him. I couldn't pay. Then he said there was no real harm—no destructive harm in what I was doing. He said I was only helping to gather information. So I kept on because I was afraid not to. I made use of Ralph Grabowski, although he never knew it. I would pose to him for my portrait, in his studio, and leave a letter where Mir Mahomed could find it when he came to pose

for his. Long before that image was finished we used it as a letter-box. Then came this letter and I was at my wit's end how to deliver it, because Mir Mahomed could no longer cross the border. Then the dog brought that message from you. I took it at once to Ralph Grabowski and he told me about sending the statue to the mullah. I helped him wrap it, slipping the letter inside the head when he wasn't looking. Then I grew deadly afraid—afraid the troops might capture the statue and find the letter. If they did, how could Ralph possibly have proved it was not he who was acting as go-between? So I followed. I followed him in order to be there to take the blame if the worst should happen. There, that's all."

A GREAT gruff belly-laugh exploded just behind us. Ralph Grabowski had been listening! He had a full bucket and had been to no pains to come quietly, but the cavern was full of the echoing din of rifle fire and ten men might have entered without our knowing it.

"That's all?" he said. He picked her up and took her in his arms. I thought she would cry, but she didn't. "Come on, there's a path sure enough below the spring; it's difficult, but we can manage. Come on, Louise—you'd better come with us. Your mullah is due for the dump. If he survives this scrap, they'll get him sooner or later—it's only a matter of time."

"No," she answered, "I'll stay, honey. My man's my man. I'll stay where I belong."

Grabowski led Winifred out to the ledge, but I lingered a moment. Louise had saved my life once; Mir Mahomed had saved it a second time. I paid that debt then. Louise was quick to see the point of the advice I gave her.

As I left the cavern I could see the Highlanders keeping up a terrific fire, taking advantage of every scrap of cov-

er, but fast closing in on the tip of the tongue of the naked ramp for the final assault. The hillmen on the ledge had eyes for nothing else; fifty people could have crept unseen out of the cavern. Nothing delayed us but our own eyes and the fascination of the Highlanders' steady advance. Their pipes were skirling, but that stirred the blood of the hillmen, too; it was going to be no pink tea when steel met steel in the open.

The track below the spring would have puzzled goats, but Winifred managed it, leaping from rock to rock behind Grabowski. My head played tricks, becoming woozy at the jumps across gaps where a fall would have meant crashing on rocks a hundred feet below.

However, by the grace of Mir Mahommed's Allah I had a letter in my pocket that so raised my spirits that I could have flown if I had needed to; and the track grew almost easy by the time we passed from under the overhanging ledge into the open in full sight of Feisal's men. By then the range was at least three hundred yards, with plenty of jagged rocks for us to duck behind. We were seen and fired at intermittently, but the fight going on below was too exciting for the hillmen on the ledge to waste more than passing attention on us.

The Highlanders' bugles sounded. The challenge of the charge came clamoring up-wind. The Highlanders were coming! The skirl of their pipes would have raised the fighting dander of a woolly baa-lamb.

Scrambling, slipping, stumbling, leaping, pausing in turn to drag each other over slippery boulders, we reached a group of rocks beside the ramp, but they were not what they had looked like from above. We had seen them foreshortened. They were a pulpit, cup-shaped at the summit, bullet-swept by the volleys of both sides and affording not a scrap of cover—not a crack between them large enough to

crawl in—useless unless we could climb them and reach that concave top. There we could overlook the ramp and possibly might signal to the Highlanders.

I don't know how we made it. My head swam and I don't remember. I know I slid back half a dozen times from halfway up, and the bullets rattled around us like spattering hail. I believe Winifred was up first.

I have a vague memory of Grabowski jamming his foot into a crevice and of my climbing over him. Then he could not kick his foot free, and I had to cling to a crack with my fingers while he held on by my leg and jerked at it for what seemed endless minutes. But we lay on the summit at last, as safe as three birds in a granite nest, and peered over the edge, Grabowski tugging at my shirt to tear it for signaling purposes.

BUT it was no use signaling. That tide had got beyond all stemming—both sides with their blood up, bagpipes skirling and the hillmen yelling "*Din! Din!*" as they got out of hand, broke cover and came headlong down the ramp to meet those Scotsmen steel to steel. They came like a galloping avalanche, in frenzy, yelling God's name; and the Highlanders met them with fixed bayonets beneath us.

The sheer speed and weight and frenzy of the charge defeated its own purpose. Ranks locked, Highlanders and hillmen sweating, swearing in each other's faces—rear ranks forcing their way upward, shouting, shoving at the men in front—hillmen in groups of dozens charging downhill, leaping on the shoulders of the men in front, kicking at heads and faces to make a hole for themselves near the fighting line—more than a dozen hillmen even leaping in among the Highlanders and dying on the bayonets of the rear ranks.

We yelled ourselves hoarse. Grabowski waved my shirt, but nobody could hear us in that tumult and none

had time or inclination to look upward with all that cold steel flashing in his eyes. There was an officer beneath us, jammed between Highlanders and hillmen so that he could not use his arms; I pulled out Louise's pistol and shot room for him to move in. Then he half turned and yelled at the men behind him:

"Shove, you slackers!" His voice broke in almost a scream. "Pipes! Bugles! God! Can't you fight?"

The pipers were jammed in the crowd, but struggled free, and suddenly the drones set up a waspish undergrowl. Then, yet more suddenly, the skirling, swaggering lilting war tune of the Campbell Highlanders split through the din of the *mêlée* and the rhythm of it wrought its magic. They were coming again—the Campbells were coming. Oho! Oho!

"Shove, you blighters!"

From behind, a sergeant-major worried the heels of his men like a half-back nursing a Rugby scrimmage. He began to use his fists. He bucked their rumps with head and shoulders, as a ram goes into battle. A foot—a foot and a half—a yard of the hillmen's front line bent inward, yielded, and the mob behind them, crushed until it had no breath to yell, could neither turn nor reach over the heads of the men in front to slash at the heads of the Highlanders.

I looked for Mir Mahommed in the *mêlée*, but could not see him. Then I spared one second to glance at the ledge where Feisal's men had built their loose stone rampart. They appeared to have vanished, but I saw Mir Mahommed standing alone and motionless on a projection of the ledge. He had a rifle in his hand, butt to the ground. I thought I knew why he was standing there.

Then the din and the skirling—"The Campbells are coming, Oho! Oho!"—and the charge blown on two bursting bugles forced me to look down again. The hillmen yielded ten feet at one grudging break and there

was room for slaughter—bullet and cold steel.

"Forward, Highlanders! Vibration does it! Damn—I said vibration does it! Forward, Highlanders!"

I could not see that officer's rank or recognize him, but he was drunk with the vibration that he praised. He scrambled upward—split a hillman's throat on his sword-point, and went down cleft to the chin by a tulwar, that its owner could not drag free soon enough to turn a bayonet thrust.

That began the retreat and the rout, the hillmen giving ground at first with the notion of gaining the advantage of the hill to come charging down again; but the Highlanders swarmed too doggedly against their yielding line, storming the steep ramp two by two, a front man using the bayonet, a man behind him firing over his comrade's shoulder.

I LOOKED again for Mir Mahommed. He still stood there motionless. A sergeant-major saw him and took pot-shots at him with a rifle, but the angle was difficult and the target was toward the sun with a background of glittering cliff. He missed repeatedly. He made six men rest their rifles on rocks and try it, but either they had the range wrong or else they, too, were baffled by the angle and the glare off limestone.

Suddenly the hillmen took to their heels and scrambled up-hill, not more than a dozen of them pausing to use their rifles. The Highlanders took things easier, using all the cover they could find and sniping as they climbed in pursuit. I saw then what had happened; there was tumult in the pass beyond the ledge, hillman against hillman.

The mullah's men in retreat had met the sons of righteousness arriving to throw the sinful mullah from the cliff and burn him before his obsessing devils could escape into jackal's bodies. There was fighting up there as fierce, for a few moments, as the

Highlanders had had to face; and the steadily advancing Highlanders took vengeance for their dead and wounded, who were strewn all the length of that naked ramp, by kneeling to fire murderous, low-aimed, ricocheting volleys into the human driftwood-jam that choked the pass. But Mir Mahommed still gazed down at us. It looked as if he meditated on God's mercy and on man's inhumanity to man.

There were wounded in need of anything one could do for them. We three slid down from our pulpit-rock behind the Highlanders' advance and lent a hand, but a wounded sergeant with his nerves gone ordered us down into the valley and began shouting for some one to make us go. So we climbed instead; there were plenty of wounded up the hill who needed first aid.

Looking up, we saw the first of the Highlanders who reached the ledge. The hillmen in the pass who had fled by that time and the Highlanders turned along the ledge to deal with Mir Mahommed. We could hear their challenge—a gruff command to put his hands up. Mir Mahommed stood still,

motionless. He took utterly no notice of them.

An officer joined the Highlanders. He led them cautiously along the ledge toward the mullah, approached him, touched the rifle on which he leaned—and the thing he had thought was Mir Mahommed toppled forward to fall in graceful somersaults and flatten on the rocks below, a mass of shapeless paper pulp. Grabowski's artistic sin, that brought the mullah's plans to ruin, had served him a good turn finally. Louise had taken my advice.

We scrambled on behind the Highlanders and turned along the ledge into the cavern. But there was no Louise, no Mir Mahommed. The Highlanders searched, but drew the cavern blank except for half a dozen mules and a few filthy blankets. It was Grabowski who found the dark hole, at the back of the place where the mules were stabled, that led into another, smaller cavern, from which there was a natural passage opening at last into a fissure between two hills and a track leading northward over none knew what wild ranges.

THE END.

Taming an Octopus

A CALIFORNIAN once decided he wanted an octopus for a pet, so he built an open-top glass tank, furnished it with rocks and kelp, and hired a couple of men to catch an occupant. They caught two of the creatures, one large and one half grown, in a deep pool in the rocks off Monterey—the same pool in which a giant squid with a radial spread of thirty feet and weighing several tons had previously been killed.

The man spent several weeks trying to tame his hideous pets; he learned that there is a difference in sea creatures the same as in human beings, or in horses and dogs. After patient efforts to win its confidence, the smaller one allowed itself to be rubbed gently between the eyes and seemed to enjoy it, but the big fellow would always rush to the attack like a fury, its writhing arms alternating between gray and red, and its saucer eyes ablaze with green fire whenever the man would plunge his naked arm in among the livid tentacles. Once it seized his arm and almost succeeded in dragging him in.

Having satisfied himself that the octopus was not amenable to kindness, was incapable of fear, and could scarcely become a house pet, he sent the tank and its squirming contents to the nearest zoo.

Minna Irving.

A Pretty Good Dog

Jim Matthews's wife hated and scorned his beloved husky, Makun—but not even Jim knew the full value of such a dog on a North country trap line

By
FLORIA HOWE BRUESS



*He stumbled along
after Makun*

"I'll give you a hundred for the dog. You'll never have an opportunity to sell him for such a sum again. That's a whale of a price for him."

Chet Browning then leaned back in his chair, stretching his legs to the blazing log on the great hearth. It was warm and cozy in the little cabin with the sleet peppering the roof and a forty mile wind ripping through the forest trees.

As the silence in the room remained unbroken, he looked sharply at his host. Jim Matthews's eyes were fixed broodingly on the leaping flames on the hearth. One hand hung over the arm of his chair, his groping fingers sought and found a silky sharp-pointed ear. Caressingly he pulled that long ear.

"You're not hesitating, man?" Browning persisted. "Why, I could buy plenty of good dogs for a hundred dollars."

"There's nothing keeping you from buying 'em, Chet. Somehow Makun and I aren't anxious to part company. We're sort of used to each other." Jim lifted his quiet gray eyes to Chet's frowning gaze.

Jim's wife, who had been listening

in the little kitchen, swiftly entered the cabin's main room.

"I think I have something to say about that, Jim." Quick anger reddened her cheeks, glowed in her dark eyes.

"Oh, yes, I know you would like to get rid of Makun. You'd give him away—"

"Yes, I would," she flared swiftly. "That great ugly brute. The meat it takes to feed him! Twice as much as the other sled dogs. And he's treacherous—"

"When did you ever catch him in any treachery?" Jim interrupted, his gray eyes darkening.

"Well—he's half wolf, anyway. You even call him Makun, which is Cree for wolf. And with that much

wolf blood in him, he can't be any other than treacherous."

Chet extracted his leather wallet, took out a roll of bills. Lily's eyes gleamed as they fell on the crisp bank notes.

Makun came to his feet, gave a prodigious stretch. For a second he looked questioningly from face to face. The firelight lighted his green-amber eyes. He stood stalwart, long-limbed, deep-chested, powerful, magnificently coated.

Chet's eyes narrowed as he watched the superb animal. He wanted that dog. What a racer he would make! Look at those long slim legs, the lung power in that deep chest, the virility in every line of that long dark-coated body.

"I'll give you a hundred and twenty-five for him, Jim." He began counting out the crisp bills.

"He's not for sale, Chet. I've raised Makun from a pup. He's not just a sled dog to me. He's—oh, well, you're a dog man. You understand."

"Jim Matthews, are you refusing a hundred and twenty-five dollars for that wolf dog?" Lily's voice was filled with indignation. A hundred and twenty-five. What purchasing power it held!

"I'd refuse twice as much, Lily." Jim's eyes were as coolly determined as his voice.

Chet slipped the wallet back in his pocket. He would wait. Give the woman a chance to get in her work.

WITH the step of a panther, so light, buoyant, and noiseless it was, the great dog Makun paced the cabin. Then he returned to Jim and stretched out at the man's feet, pointed nose between massive outstretched paws, deep-set eyes fixed unwinking on Jim's face.

"How's the trapping, Jim?" Chet asked cheerfully.

No hurry, he told himself. He must use the Indian's patience.

"Last year it was fine. There isn't a better fur territory in all Ontario than I've got right here. But—" Jim paused, troubled eyes brooding.

"Then what's wrong? If the fur is here, you know how to get it."

"Oh, it isn't my traps. No better trap on the market than these, but—" he smiled ruefully— "I'm almost ashamed to admit, Chet, but there's a damn wolverine following my lines. You know the cunning, the tenacity of the beast. He is a very devil. I got a glimpse of him at one of my traps, but he got away from me. It seems a strange thing to say, Chet, but that carcajou is going to break me if I don't get him. Winter is on, I can't change my territory to get away from him. And our cabin is snug, well-built. It's too late in the season to build another in a different territory."

The wind threw the sleet against the log walls of the cabin, tore at the door as though powerful hands were attempting to tear it from its hinges. On the sweep of the wind came the howl of the wolf, aching, long-drawn.

Makun's ears twitched. With marvelous swiftness he came to his feet, padded to the ice-glazed window. Chet's eyes glowed as he watched the animal. Yes, he would wait. Chet's eyes appraised Jim Matthews, one of a rugged and silent breed of men, trappers who raise a cabin in the heart of the wilderness and combed its frozen white reaches in quest of precious furs.

Then he gazed at Lily, a girl born in a Hudson's Bay post, whose sturdy shoulders had known the pressure of rifle and whose fingers had felt the chill steel of the skinning knife.

"We lie awake half the night debating ways and means for exterminating that black devil," Jim went on. "I've tried everything. But he springs the traps, and ignores the poison bait; I don't use much of it, for it's bad on the furs, you know. But when he gets a piece, does he eat it? No! When

ever I have a catch, that devil is ahead of me. I find the fur strewn on the snow. Often the carcass is not eaten. That's the way of the carcajou. He takes fiendish delight in wrecking anything he gets his big flat paws on, even when his hunger is satisfied."

"Tough luck, Jim," Chet murmured. "But you're bound to get him."

"But when? I'm due at the post now. Should have a couple of good bales for trade, and all I have is a few muskrat." There was a bitter note in Jim's voice.

"There was a silver in a trap yesterday," Lily said, joining the conversation. "Its pelt was slashed to ribbons. That meant a loss of four hundred, for it was a prime."

"Funny thing about the wolverine, or carcajou, as you trappers call him. I've heard of one driving a man from his territory for that season. Funny, that an animal can best a man," Chet remarked, a note of scorn in his voice.

"Yes, it's funny—damn funny," Jim answered quietly. But the flush mounted in his face.

THERE was a lull in the wind. The sleet had turned to snow, drifting down in great flakes. Then came the fog, a milk-like sea out of which forest trees lifted dark heads as though buried in flood water.

Chet strode to the door, stood looking out. His dog team lay in their harness before the cabin door, curled up, sleeping.

"Well, I must be getting on. Weather's changing, and I want to make Pete's place before night. I hear he has a fine dog. I intend to get a string together for the April races that nothing can beat. I'm out to make a big killing next meet."

He took out his wallet again. Silently he counted out fifteen ten-dollar bank notes.

"My last offer, Jim. Take it or leave it."

Jim looked with haggard eyes at the

crisp tempting currency. What relief the money would mean. The flour was low, the sugar gone, the staples were fast dwindling. He would soon need ammunition.

True, his credit was good at the trade-house at Elkwan Post, but he hated to use it. To see the surprise in the factor's face. To admit the humiliating fact that a damn carcajou had bested him. To see the sly grins on the faces of the other trappers.

How happy he and Lily had been to find this rich territory that lay untrapped. How they had expected to see a large total to their credit on the company's books at the end of this season.

And now, to have to ask for credit! The news would drift by moccasin telegraph—as all northern news drifted—to Whale River Post, Lily's home. Jim Matthews was broke because of a carcajou. A hell of a trapper he was.

Lily read his thoughts. She stepped to him, laid a hand on his arm. "If you accept it, no one need know. It will tide us over, Jim, until we can lay the devil that is breaking us," she said wistfully.

Pride, true, this girl had her pride too. He hesitated, eyes on the crisp bills.

Flour, sugar, and many other things. A new collar to replace Makun's worn shabby one. Why, no, he wouldn't have the dog then.

He turned, looked at the animal. Makun stood by the door. He knew his daily hour in the cabin had expired, and was ready to go out to the kennels, to join his mates.

With the inscrutable wisdom of the wild, did the dog read something in the haggard eyes his master turned on him? He stared back into those eyes, then with his light step walked to the man, a low whine in his massive throat.

Chet spoke swiftly. He had seen the indecision in Jim's face. "Remember, Jim, you will have occasion to be mighty proud of that dog. With

my training I will make him the finest racer in the North. The Yukon itself will be able to boast of no finer dog-flesh."

Makun stared up at Jim. Rising on his hind legs he placed his paws on the man's chest, looked at him with deep-set steady eyes.

After a moment: "Down, boy," Jim said. The dog dropped instantly, stood quietly at the man's side.

"Thanks, Chet. You've made me a good offer, but I can't take it. Makun is not for sale," he said grimly.

Chet knew that voice. He replaced the currency in his wallet. He knew he had lost. "I'm sorry, Jim."

A moment later they heard his mush-cry, heard the tinkle of the harness bells as the dogs scampered onto the trail.

"We'll fight it out, Lily." Jim turned to the girl.

"We're licked now, and you know it, Jim. You love that great ugly beast more than you do me. You'd sacrifice me, before you would him." She shot a glance of cold hatred at the quiet Makun.

Jim was too hurt to reply. He stepped to the door, opened it. The dog with the bound of a cougar, lithe, swift, graceful sprang out onto the snow.

WITH Makun beside him Jim made the rounds of his ten mile line of traps, the following morning.

The first trap held the torn, clawed body of a prime red fox. With compressed lips Jim removed the carcass, baited and reset the trap.

That operation was repeated the length of the line. In every third trap there had been a catch; red and cross foxes, marten, ermine. Prime pelts. The traps that held no catch had been sprung.

On his knees Jim examined the method used by the wily wolverine. He cursed softly as he noted the devil-

ish ingenuity of the beast. The snow surrounding a trap that held no catch had been scratched in long criss-cross ruts, until the rut had disclosed the yawning steel jaws of the trap. The meat bait that led the beast to the trap had been scornfully refused.

"He must use the tip end of his claws, for he never gets caught," Jim muttered. "If he would only plant one of those devilish feet of his—"

A quarter of a mile behind Jim a black beast with a light stripe down his side, his low, heavy body humped, his sinister, deep-set eyes gleaming wickedly, followed Jim.

The sun, which had been shining on a world of beauty such as fairy lore had never known, was now setting in a sea of crimson. Drifts of wind whipped particles of snow, like pearls; the last rays of sun turned bush and limb into mighty diamond pendants and sunbursts.

Blinking, the wolverine followed. It was rarely that he ventured forth until the sun had set, for no forest killer is so dazzled by light as is this animal.

Jim was on the way back to the cabin, his disheartening day's work finished. Makun, who had been sniffing the wind, froze in his tracks with a low growl in his throat as he gazed back.

Jim turned quickly. "There he is, by heaven!" he gritted. He turned his eyes on the dog. "You stay here. Don't move, Makun. I don't want you in line with my bead."

The dog sat on his tail, watching his master as Jim webbed swiftly toward the beast that had stopped, facing him.

The range was too long, he must get closer. Scornfully, defiantly it seemed to Jim the wolverine stood, his dark humped body motionless. Then he whirled and with a swiftness unsuspected in an animal of his short-legged, awkward appearance, he made for a ravine.

Jim knew the distance to be too

great for a sure shot, but he let go. Four times the quiet air rocked to the explosion of his .303 rifle.

When he reached the place, snow-pawed by the beast, that animal had disappeared. Until the light failed, Jim searched, following those big imprints.

"That's twice I've seen him. I swear, next time I'll get him!" Jim said savagely. He whistled for Makun. Across the snow the great shaggy body came bounding.

"Any luck?" Lily asked briefly, as she set the steaming bowl of rabbit stew and rice on the table.

"Old carcajou has been at his work, as usual. There were some prime pelts—in ribbons," he answered grimly. "The empty traps were sprung."

The meal was eaten in silence; Jim anxious, thoughtful; Lily mutinous of eye, face shadowed.

"Chet stayed overnight at Pete's. He came back here to-day. He does want that ugly dog. If Makun had been here I'd have let him go—"

She shrank back as Jim raised his haggard face and fire-lit eyes. There was an expression in those eyes that shortened her breath. Never had he looked at her so. Why, there was absolute dislike in that hot gaze he turned on her.

The man was worn, his nerves on edge with anxiety. He had covered twenty miles in an air of numbing cold, only to find his prizes wantonly wrecked. Why, that catch alone, one day's catch would have given him two hundred on the company's books.

"You try that," he rasped, "and I'll get the dog back if I follow Chet clear to the Yukon!"

Lily was held silent by amazement. Never had Jim spoken so to her, nor looked at her with such hot and deadly eyes.

That night she slept in the upper bunk, and listened to Jim's restless turning in the bunk beneath.

In silence they ate their breakfast

the following morning. In silence Jim set out on his trap lines. Never had such a thing occurred before. Always she had been caught to him in a bear-like hug, always his fierce kiss had left her lips tingling. Then his cheery, "back by sundown," would come over his shoulder as he crossed the little clearing. But now—

AT the first trap visited he found a glossy superb black fox. The animal lay frozen stiff as a board, the glorious pelt undamaged.

"This one time I beat you, old carcajou," Jim muttered, his eyes alight as deftly he skinned the carcass of its precious pelt.

Makun was circling the trap uneasily. Continually he criss-crossed, sniffing the wind.

The carcass skinned, Jim rebaited, reset the trap, oiling his hands with beaver grease to kill the man-scent, smoothing the snow carefully.

But his joy was short lived. The catch that day had been the finest he had ever seen, but the pelts lay torn, clawed.

As the day wore on and the sun began its nightly dip, Makun's uneasiness increased. Constantly he stopped, looked back.

With his hand to his eyes, Jim peered across the white waste. "Don't see a thing, boy. You must be hearing things."

But as he spoke a low, humped dark shape sprang into view as it pursued a fleeing northern hare. In the zest of the chase—for no forest animal, not even the wolf, loves the kill as does the wolverine—the man he followed was for the moment forgotten.

Jim slung his rifle to his shoulder fired and missed. As the shot reverberated through the frost-bound silence, the beast stopped, faced Jim.

With his eyes along his sights, Jim ran, tripped over a log, went down. The rifle flew from his hands, buried itself in a four foot snowdrift.

Jim sprang to his feet, saw the beast disappearing around a mass of snow covered rock-ledges. He heard a growl, and Makun shot by, running low to the ground. His green-amber eyes were ablaze, his lips curled back showing long poniard-like fangs.

"Hold him, boy. Hold him for me," Jim shouted.

He heard a snarl, heard the half-howl, half-scream of the wolverine. "Oh damn, where's that rifle—so near—our troubles over—" Incoherently Jim muttered as he searched frantically for the hidden rifle.

Makun rounded the rock shelf. With a scream, the wolverine faced him. The dog crouched, every magnificent muscle tensed for a spring. As he sprang the wolverine leaped aside.

Again the dog sprang. The wolverine, drawing his head down like a turtle between his humped shoulders, met that spring. He gripped Makun's neck in huge flat paws armed with a cluster of spear-like claws.

Makun was a powerful animal, with the swift movement of a cougar, but the wolverine was as swift, and very strong.

The dog's muscles stood out like whipcord as the forest killer dragged the dog's head down toward his flaring jaws.

Writhing, twisting, hind legs flying, Makun sought to break that deadly grasp. Froth covered his jaws, his blood pounded in his head like the fall of a cataract.

With a desperate, powerful wrench the mighty Makun freed himself, sprang on the black beast's back. Digging his long curved nails into the thick fur, he found footing. Well he knew after that first encounter that he dared not try for the beast's jugular.

All the cunning of his wild progenitors filled his intelligent mind. Here was an enemy whose grasp was death.

Clinging to that broad back the dog drove his long white stiletto teeth into the flesh, cutting like a cross saw. He

slashed and scored, ripped and frayed until the wolverine's thick matted fur hung in bloody ribbons.

The wolverine jerked like a mad thing as he strove fiercely to dislodge that clinging body. His jaws flared open in a last futile snap. Then a long hoarse scream throbbed in the icy air, as the dog's teeth pierced the spinal cord itself.

At last Jim's flying hands found the hidden rifle. He grasped it ran to the rock shelf. Then stopped motionless with astonishment as he took in the scene.

As the forest terror fell to his side, his dying eyes fixed in a glare of vindictive hate and lust of blood, Makun wrenched himself free of that tangled blood-matted coat and stood over the beast.

As his enemy made no motion, the dog lifted his head, his jaws stretching in a long triumphant howl.

He had made his kill and found it good.

JUBILANT, exultant, and still ruefully pondering on the fiendish ways of the wolverine, Jim made his way back to the cabin.

Darkness had fallen, and the sky was studded with stars, pale fierce eyes of the night.

Jim's heart sang as he webbed under the starlit sky. The "devil dancers"—aurora—swayed in the sky; occasionally came the long melancholy howl of the wolf.

"Lily will wonder why I am so late. Poor little woman, I was a brute to her. I'm sorry—damn sorry. And she's going to think a little better of you now, Makun old boy."

His fingers groped at his side until they encountered the dog's long sharply pointed ear. Makun lifted his massive head. With deep-set steady eyes he returned his man's gaze.

Jim hastened his steps as in the distance he heard the far wailing of oncoming storm winds. On that wind

came the howl of a wolf pack, a battle-song for meat.

A little further now. Jim shifted the head of the wolverine, in his numb arm. That head he had brought back with him as a trophy to show Lily.

"Our troubles all over now. Richest trapping territory I ever was in. Wait till I visit my traps to-morrow." The man's heart sang as he webbed along.

Now in the clearing. Hello, what's this? No light in the cabin, no friendly welcoming light of fire and candle. No yelp of huskies. Where were the dogs?

In nameless apprehension Jim stepped out of his webs, opened the door. The room held an Arctic chill.

With stiff hands Jim lit a candle. On the table beside that candle lay a sheet of paper. With a suddenly shaking hand he raised it, read:

I won't live with a man who loves his dog more than he does his wife. I have taken my own sled and team and gone to Elkwan. From there I am going home. I'm through.

No signature was necessary. Too well he recognized Lily's writing.

He sank into a chair, head between his hands. Makun stared at him a moment, then walked to him, thrust his long, cold nose into the man's hand.

A sudden blast of wind at last aroused the man. He raised his head listening to it as it came screaming its ancient hate across the frozen wilderness. He flung open the door to stare up at the sky in which the stars had been blotted out.

"What time did she leave?" he thought feverishly. Lighting the oil-filled lantern that was used only in an emergency, he stepped out onto the snow.

No fresh snow had fallen. Jim on his knees examined carefully the imprint of dogs' pads, the sharp cut runners of the long sled.

"A few hours ago. About noon, I should judge, for the wind has not

blown enough snow to fill in the imprints. And Lily will be caught in this blizzard that is coming like an express."

Quickly his decision was made. Tired muscles were forgotten before the danger that threatened the girl.

"We must eat first, Makun, fortify ourselves with hot food and drink," he muttered.

When he turned to the fire on the big stone hooded hearth he saw it had been banked, and an iron cooking pot hung on a hook over the ashes.

"She thought of me, anyway," he muttered, a warmth at his heart. "She banked the fire so I could stir it up quick, and left my supper cooked for me in the pot."

While the fire burned up, catching the small wood he piled under the suspended pot, Jim made preparations.

He fed the dog, then packed a light board pack, which he later strapped to his back. A rolled blanket, ax, medicine kit, and a kit of cooked food, made up the pack.

A savory odor filled the room. Jim heaped a plate with stewed moosemeat. The rich gravy had been thickened with the parched corn and evaporated vegetables so much used in the far north.

It was the last of those vegetables, Jim knew that, and Lily had used them with a reckless hand. Following his quick meal Jim strapped the pack on his back, thrust his toes in the webs.

MAKUN watched him eagerly. "See those tracks, old fellow?" Jim laid his mittened hand on the marks. "We follow. Got to get her, Makun."

He waited while the dog nosed the imprints then swung out onto the trail, the wind at his back, increasing his speed. White, spectral like, the forest floated by. The wind became a gale, the forest answered in a sullen, grinding undertone.

Makun, his nose to the snow, fol-

lowed those imprints. The wolf nose is keener and more sure than any bloodhound. Jim knew the dog would not lose the trail of Lily and her team.

No man in northern Ontario was more expert on the webs than was Jim Matthews. Aided by the wind at his back the miles fell behind him with incredible rapidity.

Death was abroad in the forest that night, seeking out its prey in snow-drift and treacherous icy precipice. Ahead in the distance came a long-sustained, persistent chorus of howls. Wolves were roaming in packs, Jim's hand tightened on the comforting stock of his high-powered rifle. His face was gray with anxiety. Well he knew that the gray terrors of the wild would attack a dog team when driven by famine.

Makun's dark coat became silver-crusted as his steaming breath floated behind, clinging to the shaggy fur and freezing there.

One hour, two, three hours passed and Makun stopped abruptly at the crest of a hill. Nose to the ground he stood for a few seconds then circled uneasily, an occasional whine in his throat.

There was a terrible fear in Jim's heart. What had taken place on this spot? Wolves?

Eagerly the great dog looked up into his man's face, then foot by foot, stopping occasionally with a backward glance and warning growl, he led Jim to the west side of that hill crest.

On his knees, straining his eyes through that thick gloom, Jim felt of the trampled snow. Makun paused, watching him. As Jim moved forward the dog growled sharply. Jim stopped, stretched out his hands—and felt empty space.

The side of the hill fell almost perpendicularly for some forty feet. At the foot of that precipice lay a rock-bedded ravine, with a few shallow drifts.

For a moment Jim's grim, haggard

eyes seemed to flare into a light of madness. The trampled snow, the imprint that he could feel with his hands of the overturned sled, the deep rut made by the iron runners were as easily read as a printed page.

"Gone over!" He whispered with shaking lips. "Oh, God, she went over in the sled!"

He sat oblivious of the withering wind that was fast numbing his body. Soon that numbness would reach his brain if he did not renew circulation.

The dog whined, nipped Jim's arms gently with his long, poniard teeth. At last the man roused, came stiffly to his feet, beating his numbed arms against his sides. His lean face looked strangely old for his thirty years. His firm-lipped, yet considerate, mouth was pressed into a mere gray thread.

Makun seized the mittened hand in his teeth, gave a urgent tug. Mechanically Jim followed as the dog led slowly and with many backward glances from his slant green-amber eyes. To the crest of the hill they came again. The dog stopped as though puzzled. Dully, scarce seeing the animal, Jim watched.

Suddenly Makun found the scent. A bit of fringed end, from the scarf Lily always used to wind around her mouth when in the icy air, lay bedded, half concealed in the snow, but to that wolf nose the scent while faint was unmistakable.

The dog whined frantically, as he dug up that length of wool. Shaking with excitement Jim held it in his fingers. Then blank despair seized him. "She must have lost this in the wind before the dogs went over," he thought, dully.

But Makun was trotting now, nose to the imprint of moccasins pressed firmly into the snow.

Jim followed, a mad thumping at his heart. "She always rides in the sled. She dislikes webbing. Did she escape?" he asked himself a hundred times.

Down the south side of the hill the two, man and dog went. "If only the snow doesn't come," Jim thought desperately. "If only we don't lose her trail!"

But even as he thought, the snow-sleet came riding on the wind, filling the air with icy particles, thickening the atmosphere.

WITH a rumble in his throat, Makun veered sharply. Behind a little clearing, lay a dark squat shack. A deserted prospector's shack. With nose to the ground Makun made for that shack then stopped, nose pressed against the cracks in the door.

Scarce daring to hope, blood surging in his veins, Jim lifted the latch of the dark unlighted cabin door.

"Who is it? Stop or I'll shoot!" came Lily's voice, raw, hoarse.

"Lily!" The dark, icy-cold room was filled with Jim's shout. He kicked the door shut, fumbled for a match, struck it.

In the sudden glare of light, Lily, speechless with amazement, looked with strained, unbelieving eyes into Jim's face, as she crouched in a corner of the room.

The match burned to his fingers. In the darkness he groped, found her, held her shaking body to him.

"Jim, I was on the way back to you. I couldn't go on. I couldn't leave you—"

"Thank God for that," Jim interrupted huskily. "And the dogs swung too far west on that hill, they went over and you jumped from the sled when the leader dog yelped his warning?"

"How do you know? And, oh, how did you find me? I ran for this shack. The wolves were near, I was afraid. Oh, Jim, I was so afraid. I remembered passing this shack, so I ran for it—"

Her face was buried in his parka. Jim's arms were around her.

"But how did you ever follow my

trail in the dark?" her muffled voice came.

"I didn't. But Makun did."

"Makun? Where is he?" Her voice rose sharply.

"Why, I must have shut him out."

Jim loosened his arms gently, stumbled through the dark, opened the door. The massive dog was lying on the snow-swept step.

At word from Jim, he rose and entered the cabin. Jim struck a match to light a half-burned candle stuck in a broken bottle on the table. There were a few logs lying near a rusty tin stove, and after a few minutes' work with the ax he took from his pack, wood was ready for a fire.

The fire blazing in the stove, Jim returned to Lily, who sat staring at Makun.

"We will have to stay here to-night, Lily girl, but when we get home tomorrow I've something to show you."

"What, Jim?"

"The head of the carcajou that's been robbing us."

"Jim, you got him at last?" Her voice rose in quick joy.

"I didn't. Makun did. He jumped on the beast's back and slashed till he reached the spine. Our troubles are over, Lily, and we'll have a great season. I'll have to make a new sled, borrow Pete's dogs and go to the post next week." Jim paused and went on slowly:

"Glad Makun was with me when I met up with the carcajou. He's a pretty good dog." Jim waited, his heart in his eyes, his mouth suddenly dry.

Lily buried her face in Makun's great furry neck. Her arm tightened around it. The little shack was silent save for the roar of the fire in the rusty old stove, and the shriek of the ice-ridden gale.

Finally: "Yes, Jim, he's a— pretty good dog," Lily said in an unsteady fur-muffled voice.



"Do it right while you're doin' it. You'll never get another chance!"

Man-Hunt

Riding alone into the brooding land of the Apaches, Webb Summers found the danger and action that would take his mind from his troubles—and got more than he bargained for

By CHARLES ALDEN SELTZER

Author of "The Raider," "Mystery Land," etc.

LEADING UP TO THIS INSTALLMENT

NED FUNSTALL, wild and reckless young cowboy, approaches a cabin just as Ben Lavercombe strikes and kills his wife Emily. There is a gun duel, in which Funstall kills him; then he rides south, seeking the woman's relatives, in Pardo, Arizona.

Webb Summers, Funstall's old friend, finds the bodies, and recognizes the print of his right hand—which has the third finger partly cut off—on a dusty packet of envelopes. Fearing that Funstall had committed murder, yet not wishing to set sheriffs on him until he knew the truth, Summers rides

after him, searching throughout the southern Arizona outlaw country for him.

In Pardo he finds news of Funstall; and when he rescues Laura Bainter from the advances of Judge Lavercombe she tells him of Funstall's supposed death at the judge's hands. Lavercombe and the Loaza gang are after a hidden gold mine on Laura Bainter's property; and when Summers sides with her two attempts are made to kill him. Each time a mysterious rider comes to the rescue.

Finally the Loaza gang surround

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the Bainter cabin, trying to kill Summers, Laura, and her crippled brother Jerry. Summers accounts for several of the Mexicans, and then stands siege in a tunnel under the cliff till the gang are dispersed by the coming of Clay Meeder's men.

Meeder is a reckless, dangerous man, an unsuccessful suitor for Laura's hand. With him comes Ned Funstall! Funstall tells how, when he was in a fever, some one who resembled him stole his clothes and horse; this was the man whom Lavercrombe shot.

Summers questions Funstall about the killing of Ben and Emily Lavercrombe; and when Funstall realizes that his friend suspects *him* of striking Emily he grimly refuses to clear himself—not realizing how damning the circumstantial evidence looked, nor how Summers had come all this distance, hoping against hope to clear him. Summers has an added blow when he chances upon Laura and Clay Meeder. She has just thanked Clay for the rescue and has confessed her love for Summers, with a plea to Clay not to fight Webb. When Summers comes in she is just kissing Meeder in her gratitude for his half promise.

Disillusioned, and feeling that he is no longer needed, Webb Summers rides away blindly, not realizing he is on the trail into the Apache country.

CHAPTER XVII.

A BROODING LAND.

SUMMERS rode slowly, permitting Major to choose the pace that suited him; and Major, strangely, went forward at a light chop trot, stepping warily and snorting occasionally as if something were coming down the wind that he distrusted.

Summers was deeply thoughtful. He was certain that he had wasted his sympathy and his time. It had taken him several months to do what he had done, and at the end he had been re-

paid by sarcasm. Yet he was aware of no resentment. He had voluntarily begun his search for Funstall, basing his hopes upon Funstall's innocence. That he had held such hopes in the beginning testified sufficiently, he thought, to his faith in his friend. The evidence had been there, but he had chosen to believe that it hadn't told the entire story of the murder.

Apparently the evidence hadn't lied. Funstall hadn't denied killing Emily. And Summers's sympathy for Funstall had changed to sorrow.

Riding out of the timber into a great green level that formed the valley floor, he was reflecting on his reluctance in parting with Funstall, even after he knew they could never be on friendly terms again. His heart was heavy with regret, and his thoughts were dismal.

"We always were pretty thick," he meditated. His break with Funstall seemed like a dream to him. "Ned couldn't do that to a woman!" he decided defiantly. "Why, he respected women more than any man I ever met." Yet there was the evidence, and there was Funstall's own admission.

About mid-morning he rode out of the valley up a long slope to a gorge, where he watered his horse. High granite walls rose above him.

Some bright green grass was growing on the floor of the gorge, and as he was in no hurry he pulled saddle and bridle off Major and permitted him to graze. The gorge ran straight down to the bottom of the valley, and Summers seated himself on a rock and gloomily scanned the back trail.

The entire valley was disclosed to his view. Over the tops of the trees he could see the east slope and a great deal of the level country beyond. Some high sand ridges kept him from seeing the buildings of Pardo, but on the north slope of upland rising from the level near the town he could discern Juanita's cabin nestling among the trees.

"A better woman than some that wouldn't look at her," was his conclusion.

Undoubtedly Juanita had knowledge of the method by which Mrs. Blandin, Emily's mother, had been killed, and the same horrible death had been designed for her. Courageous and gentlemanly fighters, those Loazas! And Judge Lavercrombe was but little better.

Well, he didn't have to worry about them any more. He knew Funstall, and he had no doubt that Clay Meeder would now take Laura under his protection.

From where he sat on the rock he could not see the Bainter cabin, but he could faintly discern the cliff where he and Laura and Jerry had stood behind the parapet wall watching the Loaza men attack the cabin. Summers thought he observed movement on the cliff, but he couldn't be certain because the distance was so great.

However, he wasn't greatly interested, and at last he rose, saddled and bridled Major, mounted, and rode up the gorge to the higher country. A turn in the trail shut the valley from his sight, and he was facing the lonely reaches of a desert which was rimmed in the distance by the purple peaks of a mountain range. It was a strange, wild, high section of the country encompassed by an imperial silence.

He knew that somewhere beyond the mountain range might be found towns—Bisbee, Tombstone, Bowie, Nogales—and he had determined that he would find employment near one of them. He would not go back to the north country, where he would constantly be reminded of Funstall and the old care-free days when they had roamed together.

HE rode the greater part of the day through a dry, dead country featured only by low hills, grotesque ridges of sand, plains of greasewood and cactus and stretches of

crumbling lava. From horizon to horizon the dead land extended, treeless, arid, desolate.

He was accustomed to space and silence, and so he experienced none of the sensations that loneliness might have brought to one more imaginative than himself. And yet he was aware of a feeling of slight perturbation, of apprehension, a singular uneasiness that more than once during the day brought him straight up in the saddle to scan keenly the hills and ridges around him.

Major, too, seemed to share his uneasiness. He kept tossing his head and sniffing the air, slanting his ears this way and that way as though suspicious of something that lurked or threatened.

But there was no excuse for apprehension—no visible menace or danger. This was a strange land to both Major and himself—a slumberous, brooding, mystic land over which the sun stretched a tinted gauze of varied and blending colors that were forever changing formation and pattern. There was a calm, a vacuumlike stillness that seemed too intense to be natural, and yet it was peaceful to a point of absolute somnolence.

"You feel it too, eh?" said Summers aloud to Major. "Well, it's nothin' to be worried about. It's different from what you've been used to, an' you're a little fussy about it."

He was attempting to voice his own feelings, but he hadn't correctly expressed them. He knew that the strangeness of the land lay not in visible things, but in an imponderable something that seemed to move with him and the horse, proceeding with them when they proceeded, stopping when they stopped, and seeming always to come closer as if gradually encircling them, incessantly hovering near them, watching them, derisively mocking them.

But though Summers brought Major to a halt many times during the

day and carefully searched the horizons for signs of the invisible element, he saw nothing except the unchanging features of the land.

Late in the afternoon he saw a valley spreading before him, and he urged Major toward it. But before he sent Major down the big slope that led to the green floor and the timber that shaded it he brought the horse to a halt and inspected it, shading his eyes with his hands to peer into the natural coverts and recesses. Also, he scanned the high country surrounding it. He sat there long, stirred by an unaccountable impulse to head Major over the back trail.

But he fought that impulse and cynically accused himself with the words: "That's what comes of your moonin' about Funstall. All day you've been mush-headed about him, an' now you're takin' it out on the country. Imaginin' things. You, too, Major? Do you reckon we had no business to leave Funstall? You lookin' for an excuse to go back, too? Well, we ain't goin' back."

But still he did not urge Major forward. He sat, watching the dusk come. He saw the sun sink behind some distant hills; he sat motionless in the saddle, watching the wonderful colors swimming above the horizon. Then he kicked Major in the ribs, saying:

"Go on, you scare-cat. If we don't get down there pretty soon we'll have a dry camp."

CHAPTER XVIII.

APACHES.

SUMMERS had seen the dying sunlight gleaming upon water near the center of the valley, and when he reached the lower level he headed Major toward it. He did not halt the horse again, but went steadily forward, keeping Major at a walk while with alert and incessant glances he tried to penetrate the timber and the

wild growth which, once he struck the bottom of the valley, instantly surrounded him.

Dusk had invaded the valley. He had ridden into a monstrous hush, a silence that was strangely, heavily oppressive. There was no breeze down here, no movement whatever. He kept Major as close to the edge of the timber as possible, thereby admitting what he had begun to fear. He was not sure, and yet he wanted to leave a way of retreat open.

So far he had heard nothing to substantiate his apprehension. He had seen no signs. There was nothing definite in his premonition of danger. It was merely a thing he felt, a conviction that he was being watched by unseen eyes.

He reached the stream, a trickle of water in a shallow bed in a little open space between the trees. He dismounted and permitted Major to drink sparingly. After he got Major away from the stream he returned to it and knelt on a stone at the water's edge. He did not bend to drink, but scooped the water in his cupped hands and drank with his gaze on the timber in front of him. When he got up he stood motionless and rolled a cigarette. He lit it and blew the smoke upward, watching it disintegrate.

While taking the second puff he heard the low hooting of an owl off to his left, westward. He blew the second puff of smoke after the first, and any one watching him must have observed his complete indifference to his surroundings. Yet he had caught the human note in the owl's hoot, and he smiled derisively when the hooting was answered by another, southward, and after an interval by still another northward.

They were on three sides of him. The signals had come from a distance. They had followed him the greater part of the day, keeping out of sight behind the hills and the sand dunes, patiently flanking him as he rode, de-

laying until they reached a place where they could get closer without discovery. Then they would throw the silent noose or creep upon him while he slept, capturing him without danger to themselves.

There was only a small party of them, of course, or they would have ridden upon him boldly. Three or four braves, perhaps, out hunting. Now they were stalking him, and they did not plan to kill him instantly or they would have ambushed him during the day. They were planning to capture him alive.

He knew what that meant.

But now he was no longer oppressed with uncertainty. There were definite things to do, a definite danger to escape.

He had no fear that they would attack him until he rolled himself in his blankets to sleep; then they would steal upon him.

He walked over to Major and patted the animal's neck, speaking to him reassuringly. He removed the slicker, unrolled it, and spread it out upon the ground.

But while he was engaged in this task he was counting the hoots that reached his ears from the timber, locating them, judging their distance from him.

They had come no closer. As he had decided, they would wait.

FOUR hoots he had counted. He smiled grimly. Now, if they would show themselves, he would soon remove the unseen menace. But he knew that was exactly what they would not do.

He built a fire, cooked some coffee, ate some jerked beef from the small store in his slicker; repacked the coffee pot, rolled up the slicker, and sat down on a rock to smoke. Darkness found him still there.

His fire had gone out; he had purposely delayed moving until it did. When it had grown so dark that he

could not see the water in the stream, he got up and softly approached Major. There had been no hoots from the forest for a time, and he was aware that the Indians were stealing toward him, not to attack, but to watch him if possible, to listen until they were sure he slept.

For more than an hour, while darkness had been coming, Summers had studied the location and character of the back trail, up the slope to the level. The trail had led over soft, deep sand through which Major had traveled noiselessly in reaching the bank of the stream.

He would go out that way and return to the Bainter basin. That would be wisdom, for he suspected that the Indians that had trailed him were part of a large band camped farther ahead. He wasn't foolhardy, and he was in no hurry to get through to the towns he had thought of visiting.

He fastened the slicker to the cantle of the saddle, drew his rifle from the sheath, patted Major's muzzle and began to lead him slowly over the sandy trail toward the foot of the slope, eastward. He did not mount for fear the creaking of the saddle with his weight upon it would betray his movements.

He reached the foot of the slope, began to climb it. Still he did not mount Major, for if he was discovered before he reached the high country Major would need all his strength.

He began to think he had succeeded. He had chosen the period of dense blackness between dusk and moonrise, and he had judged that he had given himself plenty of time to reach the crest of the slope and vanish beyond it before the moonlight would reveal him. But he was not more than halfway to the crest when the darkness changed to a mellow flood of gold.

And now he sought to hasten Major. He ran, and Major followed him with gigantic leaps. They had reached the crest, and Summers was urging the horse on with voice and hand when the

darkness of the basin was split by a crimson streak and a bullet whined dolefully overhead.

Only one shot was fired. That shot, Summers decided, had been fired by the savage nearest the foot of the slope. They would go for their horses now, but they would not rush the slope. They would climb it cautiously, at scattered points, for fear he would conceal himself to pick them off as they came over the crest.

He would have plenty of time, but there would be none to spare, so he mounted instantly and sent Major straight eastward, into the moonlight.

That the Indians would see him the instant they came over the crest of the slope was inevitable. For several miles, until he reached the level land he had ridden over during the day, there was nothing but a smooth upland country upon which even a jack rabbit would be visible for miles. His only hope was in keeping out of rifle shot, and he was aware that to do that he would have to keep Major going fast.

But he had a good start, and Major seemed to be in good shape even though he had been traveling rather steadily all day.

Summers held him down on the upland. He anticipated that the Indians would race their horses on the rise in expectation of a quick capture, and if he could conserve Major's strength while they were winding their animals he might hope to draw farther away in a long run.

SEVERAL times while riding the upland he glanced over his shoulder.

He must have ridden at least two miles when, on again looking back, he saw them coming. But he did not increase Major's speed until he reached the level country, and meanwhile the Indians had gained a little.

However, Major was sure of foot and full of stamina. He had been tested in all kinds of range work and Sum-

mers had faith that he would even outlast the tough ponies that the Indians usually ride. Yet he rode with his rifle lying across his legs.

When he got out of the upland country and into the hills and sand dunes there was still no place to make a stand and fight it out with his pursuers. There were four of them and they would instantly surround him. Yet he kept searching for an advantageous position, for there was malice in his heart and a grim yearning to kill.

He found it unnecessary to urge Major, for the horse seemed to realize what was wanted of him. He swung along with great, steady, powerful leaps, his long, tough muscles working smoothly, his breathing full and strong. Summers leaned over and patted his neck encouragingly.

It seemed to Summers that Major was superior to the Indian ponies, for he was holding his lead without effort, while his pursuers appeared to be running their best. When Summers had first seen them coming over the crest of the slope above the valley they were bunched together. Now they had strung out over a distance of half a mile. Even the leading Indian seemed to have lost ground in the long race over the upland.

There was, as yet, no danger to be apprehended from a bullet. The Apaches were still out of range. He knew they were Apaches, for this was the Apache country, and he now remembered that three or four weeks ago, in Pardo, he had overheard some men saying that there were raiding parties out.

He was somewhat derisive over his "ride." He had intended to leave this country, and here he was heading back into it as fast as his horse could safely travel. He had been convinced that he had never wanted to see Funstall and Laura again, but he was now aware that the thought of returning was giving him unexpected satisfaction. He wondered if he had ever really wanted

to go. He decided that if that determination had been in him he would now be riding westward, in spite of the Apaches.

He tried now to account for the dismal thoughts that had oppressed him while he had been riding away from the Bainter cabin. He had felt gloomy and dispirited. Now, with danger behind him, he felt almost cheerful. Was it because in spite of everything that had happened he still liked Funstall and Laura?

That was the explanation, of course. A man couldn't toss away an old friendship simply because his friend had committed a crime. Wasn't it the duty of a friend to stand by in case of trouble? Hadn't he been too severe with Funstall? He had.

What he should have done, he hadn't done. He had been remiss, negligent. His attitude toward Funstall had been arrogant and unsympathetic. Why, he had seen strangers treat a criminal better than he had treated his friend.

That was the explanation of the dismal thoughts that had oppressed him on his ride away from the Bainter cabin. He had been reluctant to go, knowing that he hadn't treated Funstall as a friend should be treated.

However, now he was going back. And he'd stay with them until everything was straightened out. There would be no more unpleasant speeches to Funstall or Laura. He would treat Funstall as he had always treated him.

And he would never tell them that he had meditated leaving them. He'd let them think that he had only gone for a ride and had stayed longer than he had expected.

HE glanced backward again. He had been so absorbed that he had forgotten the Indians. But he saw that they were still as far behind as ever, and so he reached into his shirt pocket for his tobacco and cigarette papers. He made a cigarette, lighted it and replaced the tobacco and the papers.

Major was crossing a section of sand that was as smooth and level and hard as the top of a billiard table, and his gait was a sweeping, undulating gallop that was almost as comfortable as sitting in a rocking chair. And Major betrayed no signs of tiring.

Summers leaned over and stuck the rifle into the holster on the saddle skirt. With the reins in his left hand he stuck the right into his trousers pocket. The fingers struck a paper and he drew it out and looked at it.

It was the diagram of the mine. Laura's mine. He had got it out of the coffee canister and had forgotten to give it to Laura.

She hadn't asked for it, although she had known it was in his possession. She had trusted him.

His face grew long. Then he smiled.

The Apaches had done him a good turn, after all. For no matter how far he had gone—even if he had succeeded in reaching one of the towns he had in mind—he would have had to return to restore the diagram to Laura. The Indians had saved him a long trip. He turned in the saddle and derisively tipped his hat to them.

The chase was a long one. Mile after mile Major ran, steadily, unfalteringly. Hour after hour he kept up his giant swinging, undulating stride. About midnight Summers estimated that he had covered three-quarters of the distance back, for certain landmarks that he had observed were coming into view, and ahead of him, disclosed in the moonlight that was now slanting down over his shoulder from behind, was the low range of hills and the forest that marked the western end of the Bainter valley.

An hour later he became aware that Major had shortened his stride. Perhaps he had been running slower for some time, yet the Indians had not seemed to draw nearer. Now, again glancing back, he observed that they had gained.

Summers drew the rifle from the saddle sheath and again laid it across his legs. He watched Major critically, sympathetically.

Major had given his best, and was still giving it, but now he was slowly yielding to the inexorable demands of nature. The mighty muscles that had worked so magnificently for hours could no longer be forced by a courageous heart and spirit. He was running heavily.

Ahead, certainly not more than a quarter of a mile, was the range of hills that had been Summers's goal since moonrise. Scattered along in front of the hills were various groups and clusters of grotesque rocks behind which Summers might find shelter should he be able to reach them. And beyond the rocks was the forest.

From the basin while riding westward the morning previous, he had seen a narrow pass in the hills. The pass was only a few hundred yards north of the gorge through which he had ridden to reach the high level country upon which he was now riding, but the pass opened upon the north rim of the valley into the section through which he had traveled to reach Juanita's cabin.

Even if Major lasted until he reached the range of hills it would be folly to send him into the gorge, for the Indians would range along the higher ground on both sides and so have him between two fires.

THE Apaches were gaining rapidly now, for Major's gait had become hardly more than a lope, and he was beginning to stumble. The Indians were still about half a mile distant, and the first was some distance ahead of the others. Summers decided to employ a stratagem. He did it quickly and cleverly.

His course took him behind a huge rock escarpment and for a moment he knew he would be invisible to the Apaches. Without halting Major he slipped from the saddle, headed the

horse toward the gorge, slapped him sharply upon a hip to accelerate his speed and then ran along the escarpment to its southern end, where he would command a view of the trail that led into the gorge where Major, loping steadily, was now disappearing.

Summers hoped that the Apaches would not detect the deception. There were other rock formations which Major had been compelled to pass to reach the head of the gorge, and of course there were shadows that would partially conceal the horse.

Summers waited, grimly patient. With his rifle resting upon the rock behind which he was concealed, he followed the movements of the Indians. He saw the first brave veer sharply to avoid the first of the rocks that he encountered; but he evidently had seen Major going into the gorge. He rode close to the opening in the rock wall of the passage, then brought his pony to a sliding halt and motioned violently to his companions who were still some distance from him.

The brave was either suspicious of a trap, or he lacked the courage to enter the gorge alone. He sat erect on his pony, his bronze body gleaming in the moonlight.

He made a clear and distinct target, but Summers held his fire. Summers's rifle was a repeater of the latest type and he meant to exact grim toll if he got an opportunity.

He waited until the other three braves rode up. Then, while they sat on their ponies gesticulating toward the gorge, Summers took deliberate aim at the first brave and pulled the trigger.

He did not wait to watch the brave fall; he knew where the bullet had gone, and he worked the action of the weapon, moved the muzzle a few inches and again pulled the trigger.

Three of the ponies were moving when Summers sped the second shot. He could not get in a third at the braves, for the two remaining savages had dropped behind their ponies and

were racing away from the head of the gorge.

Summers killed one of the ponies before it had traveled a hundred yards. He saw it strike the ground on its head and shoulders. He saw its rider pitch forward to land on his hands and knees in the sand. He snapped a shot at the redskin as he scurried back to find shelter behind the fallen pony, but knew he had missed.

The third Indian had ridden out of range. He was out on the level, circling wide toward the north, and Summers knew that somewhere in the timber in that direction he would picket his pony and steal toward him on foot.

Two of the Apaches were dead. They lay motionless at the head of the gorge and their ponies were racing away, riderless.

SUMMERS was aware that he could not stay behind the escarpment. He was safe enough from the fire of the Indian who had concealed himself behind the dead horse, but the other brave would work around until he got within range.

Crouching, running, Summers retreated toward the hills and the timber. He kept the various rock clusters between himself and the Indian behind the pony, and he watched the progress of the other as he rode toward the timber northward.

Summers got into the hills safely. From behind a huge boulder on one of the hills he looked back. The brave whose pony had been killed had raced from the dead animal to the shelter of the rock escarpment that Summers had vacated. Summers saw him just as he flitted behind it.

The brave who had ridden northward was no longer visible. Summers had no desire to run; what he yearned to do was to finish off the two braves, then find Major and resume his trip back to the Bainter cabin. He had penetrated the forest to the depth of several hundred yards when he halted behind

a giant cottonwood and peered about for sight of his enemies.

Since he was concealed, the bright moonlight was an advantage to him, for the Indians would be forced to seek for him.

But he knew their methods. Every bunch of brush, every deadfall, every rock and bush and tree would be utilized in their search for him, and in their approach, should they see him.

Keenly he took note of the bushes and brush within range of his vision, knowing that now his life depended upon his vigilance.

He had chosen his own concealment well. Around the bole of the tree where he stood was a dense growth of manzanita and tall mesquite—a thicket about a dozen feet in diameter. He dropped to his hands and knees and crept into it, squirming around after awhile until he was facing the west, from which direction one at least of the braves would have to come, unless, like the other, he entered the forest at a point some distance northward.

And there, grimly alert, he waited, his ears attuned to catch the slightest sound that might break the deep and somber silence of the forest.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE MISSING SUMMERS.

AFTER leaving the stable where he had observed that Summers's horse was gone, Funstall had returned to the bunk house. He entered, threw himself into a bunk, stretched out and tried to sleep.

But sleep would not come. He kept thinking about Summers. And again resentment stirred him. He could find no justification for Summers's suspicions.

"Jumped right at it just like he was huntin' for it," was his thought. "Didn't ask me if I'd done it. Didn't ask me straight either. Got around it. 'Ned,' he said, 'do you know what hap-

pened in the Lavercrombe Basin the night you started south? Hell! Wasn't that enough to rile a man into lettin' him think what he damn pleased? Where in hell did he get the right to talk to me like that? Because I'd admitted I'd stole a few steers, I reckon. Thought if I'd steal cattle I'd go around knockin' women's heads off with my fists!"

Well, let him think so. He'd be damned if he'd tell him any different. For a moment he'd felt sorry for Summers, and the chances were that if Summers had been in the stable when he had looked in there a few minutes ago he'd have straightened the thing out. But he wouldn't do it now. Summers had been his friend, but no man could take that line with him.

So he rolled and tossed in his bunk until after daylight. Then he got up, washed and appeared at the cabin.

Breakfast was not quite ready, so he sat on the edge of the porch until he was called, and when he appeared in the doorway Laura was standing beside the table looking at him.

"Where is Webb?" she asked.

"Gone ridin', I reckon," he answered. "Anyway, Major's gone, an' I reckon Webb's with him."

"I heard you talking with him."

"Yes." He grinned. "I reckon we all rolled out early this mornin'."

Laura walked to the door.

"Which way did he go?" she asked, her back to Funstall.

"I didn't see him go. I was talkin' with him, an' then I went in. When I came out he was gone. I reckon he ain't gone far."

They waited half an hour. Then they breakfasted.

Funstall went out and sat on the edge of the porch. He smoked several cigarettes and became aware that he had wasted a great deal of time. He intended to fit in the new window sashes which he had brought over from Pardo. He went into an outbuilding to get them and when he returned he saw

Laura come out of the cabin door. She appeared to be somewhat excited and so he set down the lumber and, going to the edge of the porch, asked her if there was anything wrong.

"Webb has gone away," she said. "I saw him riding up the gorge toward the desert." She pointed. "Funstall, did he say anything to you about leaving us?"

"No. Webb wouldn't do that. If he was goin' away for good he'd have said somethin' about it. He's just nosin' around, likely."

Laura told him she had been to the parapet wall on the cliff and from there she had seen a horseman in the gorge at the western end of the valley. "It was Webb, of course," she added. "He rode up the gorge to the desert."

FUNSTALL had no comment to make. He felt that she was unnecessarily worried about Summers. He hadn't heard how matters stood between Summers and Laura, but from various glances he had seen the girl give Summers, he gathered that there was some romantic nonsense between them.

He went on with his task of fitting the new sash into the windows. He worked steadily, and he did not see Laura again until noon. By then, however, he was beginning to get worried himself and caught himself casting occasional glances toward the western end of the valley.

Little was said during the noon meal. Laura seemed to be listening. Her face was pale and her eyes had an anxious light in them. Funstall observed that she ate hardly anything. Nor was his own appetite as good as usual. The food didn't taste good, and he, like Laura, was continually listening for hoof beats that would tell him that Summers had ridden in.

They finished the meal in silence. Funstall seated himself on the edge of the porch to smoke, while Laura stayed in the cabin with Jerry. There was a

very definite depression in the atmosphere around the cabin.

Funstall's face had lengthened. He was savagely disconsolate.

"Beats hell how you can miss a man," he said.

He had spoken aloud. Embarrassed, he turned to see Laura standing in the door, looking at him.

"What did you say, Funstall?" she asked.

"Nothin'."

"I heard you distinctly," she declared. "You said you missed somebody."

"Summers," he admitted.

She could get no more out of him. He gruffly told her he had some more sash to fit, and he left her standing in the doorway.

Silence more oppressive than ever reigned over the supper table. The sun had gone down and the shadows around the cabin seemed abnormally deep. No word was spoken, and afterward Funstall went out and paced slowly up and down in front of the cabin. Laura and Jerry came out upon the porch. Laura sat in a rocking chair with her hands folded in her lap, staring out into the valley.

Darkness found her still there. Funstall had gone to the bunk house and was sitting in the doorway.

He had finally decided that Summers had gone for good.

"He's headin' for Bisbee, or Tombstone, or one of them towns down that way," was his thought. "He ain't goin' back north."

And now Funstall regretted his manner of the morning, and he knew he had hoped that his misunderstanding with Summers would be straightened out. No hope of that now.

He went to his bunk, but he could not sleep, and after awhile he got up and sat again in the doorway. There was a bright moon and he saw Laura sitting on the porch. Evidently she had sent Jerry to bed and was herself waiting for Summers.

Well, she had high expectations. Too high. Summers wouldn't come back. Disgusted with himself and the world, Funstall at last returned to his bunk and went to sleep.

It was long after midnight when Laura entered her bedroom. She, too, was convinced that Summers had gone for good. Moreover, she thought she knew why he had gone. He had seen her kiss Clay Meeder.

CHAPTER XX.

READING SIGNS.

FUNSTALL tried to smile at Laura when he entered the cabin the next morning shortly after daylight, but he failed. Never had he felt so little like smiling. He made merely a wry grimace and he did not try it again. Nor could he force himself to eat. Laura did not even sip the coffee she had poured for herself, though Funstall managed his. They sat opposite each other, staring at the table top.

At last Funstall looked up, met Laura's gaze and held it.

"I reckon I've got to tell you," he said. "He went away on my account."

"Funstall!"

"I reckon that's the truth, ma'am."

Gravely and deliberately he related what had happened in the Lavercrombe Basin. He drew a graphic picture and Laura watched him with amazed and incredulous gaze. When he concluded, Laura said:

"He told me that Ben and Emily had been murdered."

"Did he tell you that anybody was suspected?"

"No. He didn't accuse anybody."

"But you knew he was lookin' for me. Did you wonder why?"

"He said you were his friend."

She saw Funstall's lips curve ironically, and she was assailed with a divination of the truth. Startled, she gasped:

"You?"

"Yes."

"Oh, Funstall!"

Funstall looked at her with level gaze.

"I expect he thought just what you are thinkin'. But it didn't happen that way."

He told her the truth, adding:

"Summers thinks I beat Emily to death. He came down here to take me back to face the music."

"Didn't you tell him that you were innocent?"

"No. He came down here thinkin' I did it. I let him go on thinkin' that."

"Oh! You didn't! You couldn't! He thought so much of you!"

Funstall squirmed and would not look at her.

"Well, I did," he answered. "I wasn't intendin' to let him think that. But when I saw he believed it, I wouldn't tell him any different."

"And you let him go away thinking you did it?"

"I reckon I did worse than that, ma'am. Yesterday mornin' about daylight I was sittin' in the door of the bunk house, not bein' able to sleep. Webb went by. He stopped an' told me he'd decided he wouldn't take me back with him. We talked some, an' I told him to go to hell. I reckon that was because I couldn't bear to have him thinkin' I was guilty. Then I went into the bunk house. He walked away, but he came back and stood in front of the door like he was thinkin' of comin' in. He didn't. I was watchin' him. Ma'am, I keep seein' him as he looked then. But I couldn't have gone out to him then. I'd have crawled for him once, ma'am!"

Funstall's voice broke and he ended in a husky whisper.

Laura sat there, awed and thrilled by the realization of the affection that these two men had for each other, even though both were too obstinate to admit its existence.

"Oh, what a pity!" she said.

Funstall got up, straightened, tightened his belt. The wistfulness had gone from his eyes; they were now agleam with determination.

"That's how it is, ma'am," he said.

"I ain't lettin' him get away without tellin' him the truth. If he's goin' to one of them towns across the desert, I'm goin' with him. So long."

HE strode out of the cabin, and Laura, saying nothing, followed him to the door. Later he emerged from the bunk house, carrying his bed-roll, went into the stable for his horse. He mounted, waved to her and rode westward through the valley.

The sun was high when Funstall reached the foot of the gorge where Summers had sat on the rock gazing back over the valley. Like Summers, Funstall watered his horse in the gorge, but he did not dally in the gorge. He rode out of it to the high country beyond, hesitated for a few minutes to let his horse recover his breath from the climb, and then rode straight westward at a sharp gallop.

However, he had not traveled far when he pulled the horse up shortly and sat staring in amazement at the ground in front of him where there were several long feathers of various hues scattered about. They were feathers from an Indian war bonnet and as he looked at them his eyes narrowed.

Quickly he read other signs. In the sand were imprints where two human bodies had lain, and all around were hoof tracks of unshod ponies. Farther out on the plain was the body of an Indian pony.

Funstall's cheeks had blanched. He leaped his horse to the dead pony and examined the ground around it. In the deep sand were the prints of moccasined feet leading northward. He followed them to a rock escarpment and observed that they went around one end of it and away again, still northward, though in zigzag fashion from

one rock to another until they faded out on the harder ground among the hills.

Funstall sent his horse over the back trail again until he came to a spot where some pony tracks led away to the north. He followed the tracks and found they made a wide circle northwestward for about half a mile; then they turned eastward to the hills and the timber. He followed the tracks until they stopped in a wash. There he observed that a pony had stood for a time. Faint moccasin prints led from the wash eastward into the timber. He could follow them only a little distance.

He rode back to where the bodies had lain. He stood, staring down at the prints. He spoke, but did not recognize his own voice.

"He killed two," he said. A great wave of passion made him tremble.

There had been a great scurrying of ponies and the hoof tracks were confusing, requiring time to decipher. But when at last he detected the prints of shod hoofs leading down into the gorge he followed them a little distance.

When he observed that here the horse with the iron shod hoofs had been walking his face grew taut with pain. A little farther down the gorge he saw where the horse had halted. He gulped hard and returned to the high ground.

A number of sets of tracks went straight toward the timber north of the gorge, and he followed these until he came to a place where they stopped, grouped. It was not difficult to read the signs.

The savages had come upon Summers at the head of the gorge. Summers had killed two of them, perhaps more. They had dragged him from his horse. If they had killed him they would have left him, scalped. Therefore, unless the killing had been done in the timber, they had captured him and led him away. In some far retreat they would halt and inflict their torture.

Funstall rode a little distance into the timber and dismounted. He searched over a wide area and finally found a place where another Indian had fallen, for here, too, were bits of feathers from a war bonnet.

At one place near a giant cottonwood he found other feathers, and a spot on some exposed roots of the cottonwood where blood had dripped. And close by he stooped and picked up two empty cartridges.

ALL around this place were spots where the earth had been trampled, showing that many Indians had been here. And here, Funstall decided, was where the capture had been made. From this spot they had dragged Summers to where they had left their ponies.

His face grim, his eyes flaming, Funstall returned to the plain where he could read the signs further. He found that the hoof tracks all led west, so he mounted his horse and rode in that direction several miles.

There had been about a score of Indians in the group, excluding the four that had been killed by Summers, and they had gone straight west toward a land of hills and cañons.

The tracks, he decided, were eight or ten hours old, which would place the time of the capture at an early hour in the morning.

There were sections of sand in which he could see the iron-shod hoofs going and coming, and so he knew that Summers had ridden far when he had met the savages.

The tracks showed that Summers had traveled slower when going than coming, and thus he knew that the pursuit had been close.

Funstall rode back to the head of the gorge, and through it into the valley. He intended to enlist the aid of the Meeder outfit in an effort to rescue Summers, for he knew that an attempt to do so single-handed would be foolhardy.

He fought for his composure as he rode headlong toward the Bainter cabin, striving for calmness so that Laura might not suspect.

When he reached the last stretch of timber near the cabin he pulled his horse down to a lope. And when he rode up to the edge of the porch he felt he had full control of himself.

He intended to reassure the girl, and then ride on to the Meeder ranch, which was several miles south of the valley.

There was no answer to his low call, and he dismounted, entered the cabin. Laura was not inside, nor was Jerry. He went outside again. And then he saw her.

She was standing in the stable door. She was leaning against one of the jambs, crying. Beside her was Jerry, leaning against her, trying to comfort her.

Funstall went to her. She looked at him a moment, then hid her face in her hands.

Funstall stared into the stable. There was Major, saddled and bridled, standing with drooping head, his legs braced far apart. Strings of dried foam from his mouth and nostrils covered his mane and chest. The hair around the saddle, the girth and his withers were matted with dried sweat.

Funstall did not inquire about Summers.

"When did Major come in?" he asked, hoarsely.

"About five minutes ago. Oh, Funstall!" she cried. "The Indians have got Webb!"

He did not answer her, but stood, savagely glaring westward.

"Look here," he said. "The Apaches got him. They didn't kill him. They've taken him away. I'm goin' after the Meeders to help me get him. You an' Jerry hide somewhere from the Loazas until we get back. So long, ma'am."

He ran to where he had left his horse, vaulted into the saddle and raced

eastward to where a trail southward entered the valley.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE APACHE NIGHT CAMP.

THERE were twenty-seven men in the Meeder outfit, lean, bronzed range riders who were more at home in the saddle than upon their feet, and when they struck the trail of the red raiders who had pursued Summers to the head of the gorge they settled grimly to their work.

As they rode they leaned forward to read in the sand the story told them by the hoof tracks that led westward. They found that twenty-four unshod ponies had come to the head of the gorge and that only twenty had returned.

The pursuers had not halted at the head of the gorge because they knew that if they were to rescue Summers they had no time to lose. The Indians would put Summers to the torture at their first camp.

Meeder and Funstall led the flying cavalcade, and they set a pace that took the outfit over the ground with amazing rapidity. They had not started the pursuit until mid afternoon, and as dusk settled over the land they were racing down the long slope toward the big basin where Summers had first divined that the Indians were stalking him.

There were no flitting figures in the great, bare country that stretched ahead of them, but there in the sand were the hoof tracks they were following. The tracks led around the edge of the basin close to the southern rim, and went straight into a flat desert country beyond.

When the dusk grew so deep that the tracks could no longer be seen, the men halted, tumbled off their horses, and sought water. They found a stream that entered the basin, and they camped there until the moon appeared.

Thus far the Indians had not halted, but they would have to pause soon, for even their hardy ponies could not stand the terrific pace to which they had been forced all day.

Funstall was first in the saddle when the moonlight again disclosed the hoof tracks the men were following. He knew the Indians would not ride all night. They had already fled a great distance from the scene of their battle with Summers, so that any pursuit would be discouraged at the outset; but they would continue riding until midnight, perhaps, to make certain of their safety.

Then they would go into camp, and go on again at daylight toward their mountain fastness. And if they once got Summers into the mountains, that would be the end of him—if, indeed, they did not kill him at their first camp.

Funstall rode grimly and silently, keeping his gaze on the trail ahead of him, like a hunting dog following a scent. There were times when the twenty sets of tracks were not to be distinguished. Lava beds were encountered, and great stretches of granite shale along the lower benches of hills that undulated through the land. And there were narrow rock ledges where no tracks would show, and arroyo bottoms where the heaviest horses would leave no trail.

But with unerring instinct Funstall followed. He never halted, never hesitated, but kept his big horse thundering westward. And when it seemed to the others that the trail had been lost, they would be on it again; could see it in the moonlight, wavering away into distance.

The moon was directly overhead when Funstall, riding two or three hundred yards ahead of the others, had reached the edge of a timbered valley.

He came to a halt at the crest of a slope and slipped out of the saddle. The other riders saw him facing them

with a hand raised over his head, and they knew the Indians were close.

They rode up to Funstall and sat silently in their saddles gazing down into the valley.

A MILE distant, perhaps, was a camp fire. It seemed to be in a glade, near a stream of water.

"That's them," said Funstall, his voice strained and hoarse. "They ain't killed him yet. They're savin' him."

"You're right," said Meeder. "If they was aimin' to work on him they'd be doin' some of their damn fool dancin'. They're restin' up. Likely tomorrow would take them into the big camp. Then nothin' would get Summers out." He scowled at the fire. "Let's pile into them!" he suggested.

But Funstall objected.

"They'd tomahawk him the first sound they heard," he said. "I'm not so much interested in killin' them braves as I am in gettin' Summers away with a whole skin. We'll ride down to the edge of the timber, leave a couple of men to watch the horses, an' sneak up on them."

The outfit sank down the slope and vanished into the shadows of the trees. Leaving two men with the horses, they spread, flitted like shadows into the forest, and vanished.

The two men who had been left with the horses waited, listening. An hour passed, and the men grew impatient. One of them remarked: "It's takin' them a hell of a while to git thar."

Then to their ears came the thin, dry crack of a rifle, followed instantly by a score of others. Faint yells floated to them on the slight breeze, then desultory firing.

"Them's our fellows, pumpin' it into them," said one of the waiting men. "They're givin' them hell!"

There followed still more firing, and then came a heavy silence.

"Wiped out, I reckon," said one of the men with the horses. "If there was

any of the damned varmints left we'd still hear shootin'. Funstall sure won't have no mercy on them if they've put that Summers man out of business!"

Still another hour passed, and then the outfit straggled in.

"Clean-up," said one of the men, answering a question put to him by one of the horse guard. "One of them was still kickin' when we left. Funstall an' Meeder was sittin' beside him, tryin' to quiz him about Summers. The damned fool wouldn't talk none. I reckon Funstall will cut his throat. I never seen a man as mad as Funstall was."

"Wasn't Summers with them?"

"No sign of him. I reckon they killed him an' throwed him over a cliff somewheres. They'd do that if they knowed they was followed."

When Meeder and Funstall finally joined the outfit both were grimly silent. Funstall's face was pale and drawn and his eyes were pools of misery. He walked with bent head to where his horse was standing, climbed into the saddle, and rode slowly over the back trail.

"He's hard hit," said Meeder, as the other men stood by their horses, waiting for a word of command from their leader. "That Indian he was askin' questions of wouldn't open his mouth; wouldn't tell what had been done with Summers. He died, grinnin' at Funstall."

"Funstall kill him?"

"No. He died from a bullet one of the boys pumped into him when we opened up on them. I reckon we'll camp here an' light out for home in the mornin'."

"Where's Funstall goin'?" inquired some one.

"Home," said Meeder. "I reckon he's got to tell Laura Bainter what's happened. I ain't got no heart for that job."

The outfit went into camp at the side of a stream in the timber. They had

had a long, hard ride, and since there was nothing more they could do they were eager to rest.

WHEN morning came they leisurely prepared to begin their ride to the home ranch. They sympathized with Funstall and their talk as they rode out of the valley was of his obvious affection for Summers.

But Funstall, riding miles ahead of them in the lonely land, was thinking of how on the morning of the day Summers had ridden away he had stood inside the bunk house watching Summers as he had returned to the doorway of the bunk house and stood there, gazing inside, obviously seeking a reconciliation.

"He was wantin' to make it up then," was Funstall's thought. "I keep seein' him. I reckon I'll always keep seein' him. He was wantin' to tell me, an' I wouldn't let him. If I'd have said one word he'd be here today."

He rode on throughout the day and the night following. He found one water hole in the gasping land, and there he watered his horse and rested for several hours.

From a distance during the second day the Meeder outfit saw him riding far south of the trail that would take them back to their ranch, but they rode on without apprising him of their presence, not wishing to be with him when he reached the Bainter cabin.

Funstall came to the head of the gorge in the dusk, and he rode down into it to the pool where he had watered his horse on his first ride westward, and seated himself disconsolately upon a rock.

He sat there miserably until the moon came up, and then he mounted and rode down into the valley. He did not know what Laura would say to him when he returned with the news that Summers was gone. Whatever she said would not be worse than his own

consciousness of guilt. He knew she loved Summers.

"He was such a square cuss," he said aloud as he rode over the green floor of the valley.

He was certain now that Summers was dead, and it was the definiteness of their separation that engaged his thoughts as he continued to ride through the valley. It was strange, this new desolation that was sweeping over him, and he was facing it with self-accusation, with bitterness, and with cynicism.

CHAPTER XXII.

SUMMERS'S STAND.

SUMMERS was content to rest in his concealment, for he was tired.

With the exception of the time he had spent in the distant valley eating his meager supper, he had been all day in the saddle.

Yet he could not indulge his weariness to any great extent, for he well knew that the slightest lack of vigilance on his part would give his two stalkers the opportunity they were seeking.

However, an hour passed—another. So far as he could determine, there was no movement in the forest in his vicinity. He heard various sounds from the denizens of thicket and grass, but this normal disturbance of the silence was the usual nocturnal music of the forest, and he paid no attention to it beyond listening occasionally to detect any artificial or human note in it.

But he doubted that the Apaches would attempt to signal to each other. The brave who had ridden behind his fallen pony had seen the second brave scurrying northward toward the timber, and therefore he was aware that his fellow was contemplating an attack from the rear. Their search of the forest would be cautious. They would try to make their patience outlast his.

However, Summers's patience was the patience of hatred. It was a passion that had been aroused over a knowledge of the Indian method of conducting war, of familiarity with the tortures they inflicted upon their captives, of their contemptible and cowardly habit of preying upon the helpless and the innocent.

He had no fear of relaxing his vigilance, for he was eager to add the two remaining braves to his list of the night's victims.

He knew that every clump of grass, every thicket, every tree and bush and every deadfall in the vicinity of either of the Indians would be carefully inspected. They were thorough, he knew that.

But they were not close enough to him to inspect the thicket which concealed him, and in order to get close enough they would have to move. And when they moved they risked being seen by him.

It must have been three o'clock in the morning when Summers's ears, strained and attentive, heard a sound. The sound seemed to come from the timber in the direction of the gorge. It grew nearer; it developed into a crashing as of heavy twigs breaking, as of branches rustling when a great body brushed past them. Then hoof beats; then in the dim distance the outlines of a horse or pony.

Summers's first thought was that one of the Indian ponies had broken away, but as the animal in its waving and sinuous course between the trees came boldly into view in the moonlight of a natural clearing he saw that it was Major.

Summers watched the animal. With head and tail erect Major was coming directly toward him, as though seeking him.

The magnificent animal was flecked all over with foam that had dried upon him; he had served his master 'until exhaustion had overtaken him. And now, probably having found water in

the gorge, he had been refreshed and was again yielding to the impulse to serve. His ears were erect and his head was held high. His gait, however, betrayed the weariness of his muscles.

INTENTLY Summers watched him. He was still about two hundred yards away and headed directly toward his master, when he suddenly swerved away from a clump of brush he had been passing. He snorted with fear, reared, and lashed out furiously with his hind legs at something he had evidently seen in the brush.

The something was an Indian. Probably enraged at Major's attempt to kick him, the brave stood erect. The moonlight shone on his bronze chest only for an instant. For Summers's bullet struck him, and he pitched forward with that queer gesture of finality that comes with a fatal wound.

The instant Summers fired he flattened himself against the floor of the thicket.

Not soon enough. A bullet from behind went through him somewhere near his right armpit and seemed to deaden all the muscles of his body. Yet, in spite of the numbness, he squirmed slowly around until he was facing the point from which the bullet had come. Then he flattened out again.

For a quarter of an hour he did not move, although he could feel the blood from the wound trickling down his side in a steady stream.

He had expected the shot from the rear, but he had hoped to get to the ground before it came. He hadn't seen an Indian behind him, but he had felt that the one who had gone northward over the edge of the desert would make his way in that direction. The Indian had probably seen Major at once, as he had also seen Summers.

Major had been startled by the shot. He had continued to come forward though, until he had neared the place where Summers was lying, then he had

suddenly veered off, had made a wide circle, and had gone out of the forest some hundred yards north of where he had evidently entered. Summers had observed Major's movements while he had been squirming around to face the other way.

And now the new silence had lasted more than a quarter of an hour. The fact that the remaining brave did not fire again indicated that he could not see Summers as the latter hugged the ground, or else he thought he had wounded the white man badly and was waiting for him to die.

Summers tried to penetrate some of the brush that was growing here and there in the direction from which the shot had been fired, but he could see no dark blot to tell him of a concealed Indian. And then he heard a slight sound behind him.

Just a breath, it seemed, or a moccasined foot slithering lightly against some obstruction. He felt a shadow back of him, jerked his head around, and observed a bronzed body come into view around the trunk of the cottonwood tree at the edge of the thicket not more than a dozen feet distant. The brave's face, hideously painted, was turned a little sidewise as its owner peered westward. He had been about to creep upon Summers, no doubt thinking him dead or fatally wounded, and had evidently heard a sound that had interested him.

Summoning his benumbed muscles to an heroic effort, Summers turned. With the same movement he brought the muzzle of his rifle around and pulled the trigger.

The brave heard the sound of the movement and sought to dart behind the trunk of the tree. He failed, for Summers's bullet caught him fairly in the center of the forehead, just below the braided horsehair band of the war bonnet.

Summers got up, swaying, and stepped out of the thicket. He did not even glance at the Indian, but peered

through the trees in the direction the Indian had been gazing when death had struck him.

Summers expected to see Major out there somewhere. Instead, out on the plains, perhaps a mile distant and riding fast toward the forest, was a band of Indians, about a score of them.

Summers ejected the spent cartridge from his rifle and worked another into the firing chamber, although the muscular movement brought a grimace of pain to his face. Then, without another glance toward the desert, he started to run through the forest, eastward, bending low and taking advantage of the concealment afforded by the brush he encountered.

HE ran for about a mile before he slowed down. The run had weakened him, and as he stood, peering backward, he found he was swaying dizzily. Still, he was aware of a feeling of grim satisfaction, for he had disposed of the four savages who had hoped to enjoy his agonies at the torture stake.

He went on slowly. Behind him and between himself and the Indians was a mile or more of forest with its usual tangle of wild brush to obstruct the view, and he knew that he could not be seen. If the Indians followed him at all they would have to track him, and that would be a slow process.

The braves were part of a war party, of course, for their hideously painted faces and their war bonnets told him as much. And yet he doubted that they would trail him into the forest. It was more likely that they would find Major's tracks and follow the horse into the valley, thinking the horse bore a rider.

He wasn't much concerned about them, anyway, for he knew that if he didn't get somewhere very shortly he would never get anywhere. For he had lost a great deal of blood and he could feel himself growing steadily weaker.

The problem wouldn't have been great if he hadn't lost Major. Riding, he could have reached Pardo in two or three hours. Or he could have reached the Bainter cabin in an hour. He could get care at the Bainter cabin, but he wasn't certain that he could get it at Pardo. There was a doctor in the town, but Pardo was the headquarters of the Loaza gang. And at Pardo was Judge Lavercrombe.

But he was going to Pardo, if he could get there.

He did not intend to impose himself upon Laura's charity. He could not picture himself standing in the cabin door, saying: "Ma'am, I've been hurt," and asking her, verbally or mutely, to take care of him.

He shook his head stubbornly.

She'd think him a baby. Secretly she'd be saying to herself that he'd gone away bravely enough, but now he had come back not quite so bravely. Besides, she loved Meeder.

And in his present condition he did not want to meet Funstall. After all, he didn't feel right toward Funstall. He'd never feel right. On the ride back, he had thought he had forgiven his friend. He had, perhaps, for some fragments of the old friendship still lingered. But at bottom was some contempt, such as he must have felt for any man who would beat a woman to death with his fists.

If he made it up with Funstall, he would be forever seeing Emily Lavercrombe standing near him. No, the old feeling was gone. It would never return, because the conditions which had brought it into being were not the same.

He didn't want anybody pitying him, either. He could not tolerate that.

So he stayed away from the slope of the valley for fear he might yield to a sudden weak impulse and go down into it to find the Bainter cabin. Yet he stayed close enough to the valley edge to look occasionally down into it. It was green and inviting and peaceful.

There was no trail through the forest, or if there was, he couldn't find it.

When daylight came he was sitting on a fallen tree trunk, resting. He did not know how far he had walked, but he knew that the distance from the western end of the valley to Pardo was about seventeen miles and that he would have to keep going for several hours if he expected to make it.

He got up and went on. His right side seemed paralyzed above the hip. He still carried the rifle in his left hand. It had grown heavy and he wanted to throw it away; but he knew it meant a chance for life if the Indians found him, and so he held to it.

HE had only a vast self-derision for his weakness. He had always thought himself strong, and now he was aware that he was staggering. Once, after he had been walking for a long time, he found himself at the edge of a deep gorge whose bottom was filled with huge rocks and wild, tangled undergrowth.

He considered the sharp, sloping walls and shook his head doubtfully. He might get down all right, but he would never be able to climb out. As he turned and gazed along the edge he was amazed to find that the gorge was wavering.

He had never witnessed such a phenomenon. Every gorge he had ever seen had stayed in one place right along. He knew that if he tried to walk along its edge it would sweep over to him and he would fall into it, so when he left it he made a wide circle westward, away from it.

The sun was high when he reached a place where he could cross. He came out into a glade at the edge of a swale, and he stood for a time in the dead silence of the place trying to establish direction. When he found that the sun was shining in his eyes he walked straight into it.

For an interminable time he walked across a stretch of sand where there

were no trees. The world was now swimming before him. The sand stretch was making grotesque convolutions, and there were times when it seemed to him that the sky was standing on edge and threatening to topple over upon him. But although these things were puzzling at times, he knew they were illusions. So he paid no attention to them, but kept plodding grimly on, into the sun.

Late in the afternoon he came upon a small stream of water that emerged from a cleft in a rock wall. He laid the rifle on a rock and let himself down until he was lying flat on his stomach. With his left hand he scooped a hollow in the sand, waited until it was filled with water, then drank slowly.

The water refreshed him and he sat up and gazed around him. The forest out of which he had come was silent. In all the vast stretch that was visible to him there was no movement. And so, because he was still alive and no Indians were in sight, he knew they had not followed him. He felt that Major had performed a service for him in making that foray into the forest in search of him. The Indians had assumed that he had been riding Major.

Summers was sitting on a ledge at the edge of a rocky bench that jutted out from the foot of a huge granite wall. Below him was a valley. Westward the ledge merged into a level at the edge of the forest he had traversed; eastward the ledge ran in undulating fashion along the base of the granite wall until it vanished at the edge of another forest.

Summers's vision was clearer. He reached into his shirt and felt of the wound in his right shoulder. It had bled a great deal. His shirt was matted with dried blood, and his body from shoulder to hip was covered with it. But the wound had stopped bleeding.

There was a great deal of pain in the shoulder now, for the numbness resulting from the shock of the bullet striking had worn off. But he didn't

care about the pain as long as he had strength enough to continue his journey.

So he sat for a long time on the ground at the edge of the stream of water, resting. He drank several times.

At last, when the sun was low he got up, tightened his belt and went on down the undulating ledge toward the timber east of him. He was woefully weak, and he tottered as he walked. But he felt better than at any time since he had received the wound, and the world was no longer swaying and rocking as he walked through it.

Dusk found him deep in the timber.

When the moon came up he was amazed to find a faint trail threading its way through the trees. As it led eastward, he followed it. He had no knowledge of where it would take him, but it provided better walking than he had so far encountered, and so he stayed on it, anticipating that eventually it would bring him to some shack or cabin.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE HIDDEN CABIN.

THE trail led upward, over a great slope. The walking was slow and laborious work for his exhausted muscles, but he kept doggedly at it and came at last to a high level country.

More timberland.

He paused and looked back. Far down the great upland over which he had come merged into the level below the bench upon which he had rested at dusk. Now the moon was glowing upon it all, disclosing beauty that he had not seen when passing through it. Beyond the level which he had crossed after leaving the bench was another slope that led down into a valley. He thought that must be Bainter Valley, but he could not be certain, for during the day he had lost his sense of direction.

Beyond the shoulder of the hill which

formed the bench where he had rested was a bare, high land. That was where he had encountered the sand during the heat of the day. Behind the sand level was a long line of forest. It was on the western edge of that forest that he had escaped the Indians.

He had traveled far, but he was still some miles from Pardo. He turned again, and began to walk eastward, into the moonlight.

The timber was not so heavy here, in this higher country, and it was mostly spruce and fir.

He walked steadily, through heavy sand, stopping often to rest. He knew he was staggering again, and that there were times when his thoughts were not clear. Once he was certain he was talking with Funstall. He could even see Funstall walking beside him. Funstall walked along with his head down, and would not look up.

"So you're here again," he said to Funstall. "Didn't I tell you I wouldn't take you back with me?"

Funstall did not answer.

"You never were so bashful before," he continued. "I'm sorry things have turned out this way. You've changed. The trouble is that I'm the same as I was. So things have changed between you an' me. But if you'd say you didn't beat her to death with your fists I'd believe you. Damn it, Ned, you used to talk fast enough. Why in hell don't you talk now?"

However, Funstall would not talk. Just walked along with his head down, looking at the sand. Ashamed.

But it wasn't always Funstall that walked with him. Once it was Laura Bainter. He was aware of a mighty embarrassment.

But Laura wouldn't talk to him either. She just kept looking at him, looking at him the way she had looked at him when he had caught her kissing Clay Meeder. Startled, frightened. He hadn't said anything to her then, but now words came easily enough.

"Shucks," he said, "there's nothin'

to be scared about. If you want to kiss Clay Meeder that's your business. If I had any ideas I reckon they was just fool ones. You never gave me any encouragement, an' I ain't in the habit of rushin' in where I ain't wanted. I was a fool for comin' down here anyway. But I just wanted to have Funstall tell me it wasn't so."

The timber grew heavier, denser, and he was going down a long slope into a valley. He was alone again; Funstall and Laura had vanished. Halfway down the slope he leaned against a tree and gazed about him, realizing that he had been suffering from hallucinations. He smiled.

"So it wasn't anybody," he said. He bowed to the trees that seemed to bend to meet him. "Well, you was company, anyway," he said aloud.

LATER, without knowing how he had got there, he was breaking his way through some brush at the bottom of a valley.

It seemed he had no legs any more, for he was going ahead on his knees and his left hand. The right was dragging. He sat in the sand and investigated a weight that seemed to lie across his shoulders, finally discovering that the weight was his rifle.

"Now, how did you get there?" he asked.

He could not remember, but the rifle was there. It seemed to be suspended by a strap that went around his left shoulder. His pistol, too, was in its holster.

He got up again and went on, swaying perilously, but making progress. He did not know where he was now, nor could he tell in which direction he was traveling. Occasionally he came across the faint trail he had been following, and there were times when he lost it altogether and wavered around in circles trying to find it again.

About midnight he found himself leaning against a tree at the edge of a little glade. He was staring at the

square walls of a log hut just in front of him. The moonlight was shining straight down upon it.

He called, but there was no answer, and so he swayed toward it, heading for the doorway. His knees were sagging with weakness as he thumped with his knuckles on the closed door. With his weight against it he must have struck a trigger of the fastenings for suddenly the door swung inward and he fell with it and landed sprawling, face down.

The shock stunned him and for a long time he lay motionless.

Nobody came, and after awhile he realized that the hut was uninhabited. He wanted to get up and search for water, but he was too tired to move and so he just rested there, face down on the floor, in the grip of a great lassitude.

For a long time he was not conscious of anything. Then he became aware that his eyes were open and that a shaft of moonlight coming slantwise down through the open doorway, was shining upon him. Apparently during the period of unconsciousness he had turned over. Now he was lying on his back.

He was calm and cool and his senses were alert, but when he tried to get up he could not make his muscles obey him. He closed his eyes, deciding that he would try again, after awhile.

Perhaps he had gone to sleep again, for when he opened his eyes again he heard sound—the beating of horses' hoofs.

They seemed to come from a distance, and at first he was afraid they were going away from him. But after awhile they grew more distinct.

There were a good many horses, he decided—eight or ten, perhaps. They came to a halt near by, and voices came through the doorway. He tried again to get up, but found he could not make it.

For a long time it appeared the horsemen did not intend to enter the hut. He knew the riders were white

men, for he had heard the creaking of saddle leather before the horses had halted, and now he could hear their voices.

He must have fainted, for there was a period of blankness, which lifted when he became aware that the hut was full of men who had entered without his knowing it.

The men were standing all around him. They were peering down at him. One man held a pine torch which was emitting a great deal of smoke. All the faces were dancing in his vision. All were strange except the face of the man who held the torch, and even that face was not familiar, although it seemed to Summers that he had seen it before.

It was evident the men had been watching him for some time, and he felt it strange that nothing had been done for him. They must know he was wounded, and in bad shape. Yet they stood there watching him, apparently indulging their idle and perhaps morbid curiosity.

"HOW do you s'pose he got here?" said one. "They ain't no hoss anywheres around."

"How far did you look?" said another.

"Far enough to find out if he had one," answered the first man. "We saw his tracks in the sand. He's walked some, an' drug himself a lot. He come from the west."

"It's that Summers man which was hangin' around town for a spell," said a third man.

The man holding the torch drew a deep breath and peered intently at Summers.

"Sure," he said, his voice leaping oddly, "it's him! Why, hell! Damn him! Here's where I—"

"No givin' him the boot. Lavercrombe," warned some one sharply. "Shucks, the man's half dead now. Back up; we won't stand for that!"

There was a scuffle, to which Sum-

mers paid no attention; a surging of bodies, and some cursing.

The man they had called Lavercrombe was raging. It was Judge Lavercrombe, Summers surmised, eager to revenge himself for the bullet Summers had fired at him.

Summers tried to get up. He reached his knees and fell flat again. He knew he was among enemies, was aware that he would get no help from them, and he wanted to get to his feet so that he might face them.

While he was struggling to get up he felt hands running over him, searching. Fingers entered his pockets and were withdrawn holding his various belongings.

He could not prevent the search, and he was passive until he remembered the diagram of the mine in his left pants pocket. When he felt searching fingers going in there he rolled over. He managed to get to his feet, but staggered backward and crashed against a wall, where he stood gasping, his chin on his chest, looking at the men.

The torch had been stuck into a crack in the floor. Flame and black smoke belched from it, making the faces of the men dance in his vision. They were all silent, watching him.

"He's got somethin' there that he don't want to let go of," said a man, evidently the one who had tried to search him.

They surged toward him. But he had got his hand into the pocket, and he withdrew the diagram, stuck it into his mouth and began to chew it, hoping to destroy it.

Lavercrombe got to him first, and Lavercrombe saw him put the paper into his mouth. The man was upon him in an instant. He threw his heavy body against Summers and crushed him against the wall. One big hand was jammed against Summers's forehead, pushing it viciously against the wall; the other hand was at Summers's chin, wrenching, tearing, trying to force his jaws apart.

Summers tried to get at his gun, but could not reach it. The left arm was nearly as useless as the right, but he drove it into Lavercrombe's stomach with all his strength. The blow did no damage, but it was hard enough to enrage Lavercrombe, for he stepped back a little and swung his right fist full and fair to Summers's chin.

THE blow seemed to have little effect upon his already deadened senses. It snapped his head sideways almost to his shoulder, and brought flecks of blood to his lips. But it did not otherwise hurt him, and he lunged forward, again driving his left hand into Lavercrombe's stomach.

There was a roar of laughter. The other men had stepped back. Only Lavercrombe was now near Summers, and he was crouching.

He swung his right again. Summers shivered when the fist landed. His chin sank to his chest and his mouth snapped open. The paper, now reddened, dropped from his lips and one of the men made a dive for it. He opened it, held it in the light from the torch and yelled triumphantly.

The men all seemed to recede from Summers, to fade into a dancing blur around the torch. He swayed backward to the wall and dizzily watched them. He knew what they were doing. They were examining the diagram of the mine—of Laura's mine. He knew they were gloating over it and that they would go and take possession of it.

He tried to push himself away from the wall, so that he might attempt to recover the paper. But his shoulders seemed to be frozen to the timbers and he was powerless to move. He tried again to reach his left hand across his body so that his fingers might grip the gun at his right hip. But the left hand and arm would not make the movement. So he stood there, bracing his legs to keep from falling, and watched the men.

One man he knew, now—Lavercrombe. It seemed to him that Lavercrombe's face was always in the light from the torch; it appeared that Lavercrombe was continually watching him.

He stood there long, watching. All the men, with the exception of Lavercrombe, seemed to have forgotten him. One by one they vanished, ghostly figures that seemed to mingle with the black smoke that swirled around the torch.

Summers divined that they had left the cabin. They were not interested in him; they were not even humane enough to care for his wound. He didn't mind that. He had rather expected they would kill him. They would, he supposed, before they left him.

They weren't all gone, though. There was still one man in the cabin. Lavercrombe. He knew it would be Lavercrombe.

He saw Lavercrombe's face. Judge Lavercrombe. He heard Lavercrombe's voice.

"Shoot me, will you?" it said.

A terrific blow landed on Summers's face, high up on the cheek bone, almost at the temple. Lavercrombe's fist. Summers's senses reeled. He seemed to have no control over his legs, because one of them bent at the knee and toppled him sidewise. Another blow thudded against his face. His chin this time. It deadened the muscles and the skin, but he laughed at Lavercrombe. Lavercrombe was a big man. Lavercrombe was exacting revenge for the shooting. Lavercrombe was intent upon beating him to death with his fists.

"All right, Lavercrombe," he heard himself saying, "do it right while you are doing it. You'll never get another chance."

Another blow landed. And now the floor seemed to rise to meet him and he toppled forward, slowly and easily, and fell face downward to oblivion.

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK.

When Fate Finished the Game

By ANDREW W. HENDERSON

*Speed Hanley's pitches and
his luck broke wrong—
until in business life he
tried to show what
he had on the ball*

"TAKE him out!
Take him out!
Take him out!"
chanted the stands.

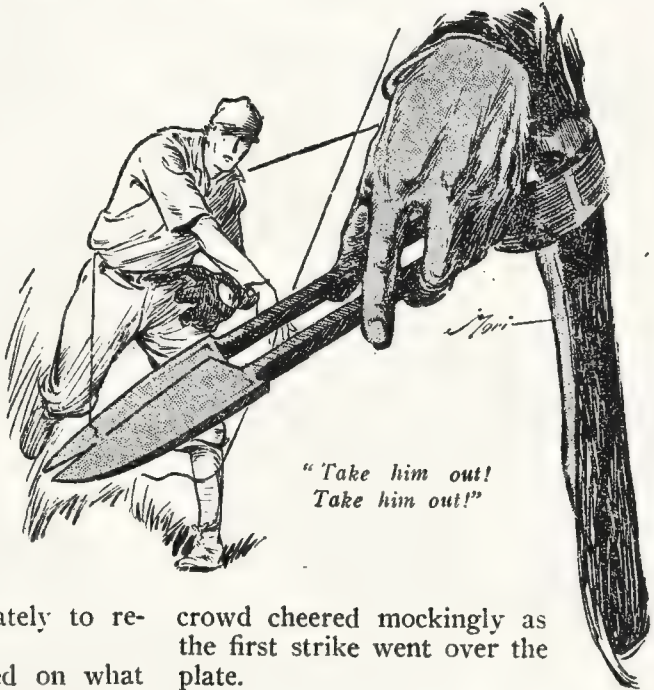
In the pitcher's box Speed Hanley, hurling ace of the Pointers, and one of the leading box-men of his league, listened in unbelieving amazement, and at the same time fought desperately to recover his control.

The Bison batter landed on what should have been Hanley's best ball for a two-base hit, and two more runs shot over the plate.

"Uh-h-o-o," the home crowd groaned. And again the chant: "Take him out! Take him out! Take him out!"

That clamor cut the frantic pitcher to the quick; twenty wins and five losses bring with them an adulation and hero worship that are not accustomed to jeers and hoots. The fickle crowd that had always cheered for him were now howling him down—now, of all times, when Hanley was giving them more than he had ever given before, was giving the last ounce of effort and cunning that was in him. He could not turn a deaf ear to them.

"Ball one. Ball two. Ball three," called the umpire, and the jeering



"Take him out!
Take him out!"

crowd cheered mockingly as the first strike went over the plate.

"Oh, you great big false alarm!" howled a penetrating, high-pitched voice that had been conspicuous by its violent abuse.

"Ball four—take your base."

A glance toward the bull pen showed three of the Pointers' pitchers warming up. Determinedly Hanley clasped the ball and put his supreme effort into the next pitch.

"Ball one," called the umpire.

Try as he would, concentrate and strain as he would, the ball would no longer obey him. In his last game Hanley had noticed a queer perversity in his delivery, but had laughed it away. To-day laughing was past.

Again he wound up, the perspiration of his straining effort standing out in beads on his forehead. Off went the ball—

Crack! The batter sent it soaring into the distant field. And in the same instant that crack seemed to be echoed in Speed Hanley's arm. Crack—as if a bone was snapped, and a searing pain shot up to his shoulder. The arm fell numb at his side, and Hanley walked gloomily from the box.

Dejectedly he passed before the stands on his way to the clubhouse, jeers and cheers mingling to speed him from the game.

"Who told you that you were a pitcher, you big four-flush?" shrieked the cutting, penetrating voice, a voice that rasped and broke in hysterical denunciation as it reached a high pitch.

"Never mind, old fellow; to-morrow's another day," came comfortingly from a seat near the exit. A glance identified the well-wisher, an inconspicuous fan of perhaps thirty, probably a clerk or a retail store salesman, Hanley decided. "They'll cheer for you to-morrow," the fan encouraged.

To Hanley's half-hysterical mind this was his only well-wisher in the park, the only fan in all those thousands who had stuck to him when the luck turned. With his left hand he doffed his cap, and then passed through the gate.

An hour later Speed Hanley passed out of the ball park and out of professional baseball.

And at the same moment Squeak Brush, he of the shrill voice, passed through an entrance at the other end of the park, passed out cursing the Pointers in general and Speed Hanley in particular for having lost him easy money.

True, Squeak had not actually lost any of his own money—he was too astute a gambler for that—in fact he had manipulated his bets so as to salvage a winning out of the defeat. But Brush was bound for a little Michigan town from which his partner, Velvet Johnson, had sent out the "Come on" signal; and now, because of the slender

pickings, he would have to travel by day coach. The esthetic Mr. Brush admitted he belonged in parlor cars, hence his wrath at Speed Hanley.

Almost at the indignant Squeak's elbow, Tom Emerson, he who had rated a doffed hat for Speed Hanley, passed from the ball park and decided to walk down town to his room; perhaps the exercise would inspire some plausible excuse to offer his landlady when she came to collect the week's room rent which he had just lost on the Pointers. Unlike Mr. Brush, Emerson had saved nothing from the debacle; he had gone down with colors flying and head up—but then it was not in Tom Emerson's nature ever to master the fine points of sharp betting—or to master his enthusiasm. He weekly rose to the bait and placed his money on the home team.

So these three passed from the ball park and out on their several ways. But the Fate that controls the destiny of ball players—and other things—held tight to their invisible life strings and waited for a more favorable opportunity to finish the game.

LORIN EMERSON, president of the Hendon Metalware Company, sat at his desk and listened, his eyes gazing past the well groomed form of his general manager and out through the big window that overlooked the works.

The great chimneys, the railroad siding with loaded cars ready to be hauled off, the blocks of grimy red walls were not beautiful perhaps to outsiders, but they seemed precious beyond price to him. Each building, each wing, each stone almost, represented another step in the development of the plant, a plant which he had seeded and cultivated from nothing up to its present sweeping dimensions.

Throughout his mental review of the plant's growth purred the smooth voice of the general manager:

"Constantly increasing cost of pro-

duction—antiquated methods unable to cope with modern competition—a new lease of life for the concern, a rejuvenation for the plant—no other way to keep step with our competitors—Mr. Brush has carefully worked out the details—added capital can easily be interested—incorporation is the way of modern business—one-man holdings are things of the past—”

The arguments were certainly convincing. Perhaps Emerson's aversion to incorporation was old-fashioned, proof probably that the time had come to take in partners.

Mr. Johnson had arranged everything. The incorporation meeting would be held in the morning.

After his general manager had left the office, old Lorin Emerson walked to that big window and, hands on the framework, stood watching the myriad activities of his plant, his old face softening into a tenderness that his bachelor heart held for these creations of brick and stone.

Somehow he could not rout that germ of suspicion that plagued him. Almost two years now Johnson had been with him; a year since Brush had come from an Eastern city, on Johnson's recommendation, to fill the new post of efficiency director. Since their coming Emerson had subconsciously been feeling the business slipping from his control as he was relieved of detail after detail. And at intervals that sixth sense seemed to warn him that all was not right—only to be laughed away by the reflection that he was jealous of these young men with their modern methods.

But to-day the uneasy feeling would not laugh away. With decision the manufacturer returned to his desk and thoughtfully wrote out two letters, one of which he placed within the other. He rang for his secretary and directed that the envelope be stamped and mailed immediately.

Then Lorin Emerson sat back in his chair and settled his eyes once more on

his plant. Subconsciously he noticed the office boy passing down the street with the letter he had just written. Then his eyes drifted to two tall chimneys belching lazy smoke. The columns of black smoke were soothing—and he was tired. Very tired.

Lorin Emerson fell peacefully asleep.

“OVER a year's work gone to hell!” General Manager Johnson, known to his pals and more than a comfortable number of police officials as Velvet, protested hopelessly. “Just when I had him all worked up to the idea, all ready to swallow the scheme—the very day before—Emerson goes and kicks the bucket!”

“You should have rushed him. No sense in fooling around like this,” reminded Efficiency Director Brush, his voice a cross between a sneer and a reproachful whine. “I told you half a dozen times to rush him. But you knew best. Now where do we stand? In the gutter—hell, the chances I've been passing up, to sit around here in this sure-thing game of yours!”

Johnson was slumped in the chair that had been Lorin Emerson's, while Squeak Brush made himself comfortable in an easy chair beside the desk. Through the office window the big plant loomed, idle and deserted, closed down to mourn its dead creator.

“Now where do we stand?” Brush repeated in a higher key, as his usually dominant partner made no answer. “In comes this nephew that no one ever saw or heard of and grabs control. Ten to one he will be a know-it-all and we'll find ourselves hitting the rails. Better clean up what we can get now and clear out while the going's good. The bank—”

“Couldn't get away with a thing,” Johnson cut in succinctly. “The first suspicious move we made would cause trouble. What we could lay our hands on now wouldn't be pin money. Best

thing we can do is to sit tight. Listen, we're not licked yet!"

His confidence was returning. "Wait till we've had a look at this nephew chap. If I could sell the old man I can sell the nephew. Now get this straight: we're going through with the game. We'll start in to-morrow just where we left off—and when friend nephew arrives, you follow my lead."

As Squeak Brush was an expert follower by nature, there was nothing more to be said.

IT was Tom Emerson's third day in Hendon, three days of amazing adventures, of events following so rapidly upon one another that all passed in a kaleidoscopic maze before him. On the third day he knew little more about the business he had inherited than at the moment he had arrived in response to the attorney's wire.

The capable manager, Johnson, and the efficient Mr. Brush took care of everything, politely but firmly steered him away from each attempt to get his bearings. Seated in old Lorin Emerson's chair, his successor had nothing to do but review the queer freak of fortune that had snapped him from a clerkship into a factory ownership. Time was hanging heavily on his hands.

"Just a few releases for you to sign, Mr. Emerson," Johnson unobtrusively interrupted, and Brush followed with another schedule which needed his dummy signature.

"Mr. George Hanley to see Mr. Emerson," the office boy announced, and Johnson quickly arose to meet the visitor at the door. The manager accepted the letter the visitor presented and studied it perplexedly.

"Hm—I didn't know anything about this," he mused. "Mr. Lorin Emerson, who wrote this letter, died last week, and I did not know he was making any plans for the baseball team."

"Baseball team?" Tom Emerson looked up with interest. It was the

first familiar subject he had heard mentioned since leaving New York. "Have we a baseball team?"

"Why, yes," Johnson answered uncertainly. "One of the hands has been managing it, I believe. But I can't see why Mr. Emerson thought of taking on extra help to get men for a ball team."

But Tom Emerson did see—especially when he recognized in the modest George Hanley the Speed Hanley to see whom he had paid out many a hard-earned dollar. No matter what he did not know about metal ware, Tom Emerson knew baseball. As a result the team got a new manager and a new pitcher, the firm got a new bookkeeping assistant, and Tom Emerson got a new interest in life.

Hanley was quick to recognize the one face he remembered from that tragic day of a year before, a recognition that decided him to stay in Hendon. If old Lorin Emerson had wanted him, he had better stay around for the sake of this chap who had stood by him when all the rest booed and jeered.

"That's a break. This baseball will keep him busy and out of the way," Johnson congratulated himself as Emerson and the ex-league pitcher set out to rejuvenate the rest of the team.

That night Speed Hanley sent a brief telegram back over the route he had traveled. "Emerson dead. Staying on my own. Hired as bookkeeper-pitcher," it read.

With that began a rare friendship between Hanley and Emerson. Days of patient practice on the part of the pitcher, and tireless coaching and advice from the manager. For Emerson they were days of play; for Hanley, days of renewed hope that perhaps, after all, he could recover his lost skill. Days of practice on the ballfield, and often evenings secretly spent over the office books.

As day by day his skill improved and the old tricks came back, hope flamed brighter. Hanley could picture the

day when he would make his triumphal return to professional baseball.

Each year the Hendon team played its principal game with the representatives of a rival plant in near-by Windsor. It was the big game of the year—a game at which company spirit ran high and at which money was bet heavily. In that contest Hanley would face the test that would decide whether or not he had come back.

TWO nights before the Windsor game the rear room which served as general office for the Hendon Metalware Company was dark and deserted; the time-clock ticking away in one corner indicated ten o'clock. Only at one of these desks near the open safe a small desk lamp burned. In its glow sat Speed Hanley, busily checking the office books with several pages of typed figures and notations. A triumphant sparkle lit his eyes as he worked, and a grim smile played about the corners of his mouth.

Suddenly he stopped short and cocked his head to listen. A door creaked, footsteps clattered in the silent entrance below, voices sounded. Swiftly and noiselessly Hanley replaced the books in the safe, winked out his light and crept under an old-fashioned three-sided desk just as two men entered the room and passed on to the manager's office. Their voices identified them as Johnson and the efficiency director.

A light snapped on in Johnson's office, and soon their voices were distinctly audible as they resounded through the empty office."

"Twenty-five thousand dollars!" the high voice of Brush exulted. "It was like taking candy away from a kid. A few doses of corn liquor. Then Dillon and Fallon got him into an argument. Emerson swallowed it bait, hook and sinker. They've booked him for twenty-five thousand on Saturday's game—and the poor fish hadn't a chance in the world of winning.

Gave his note for it. And you know what chance he has of meeting that note."

"Unless I am mistaken, our friend borrowed his fare from New York to Hendon," Johnson commented dryly. "And he hasn't more than two or three thousand in ready cash from the estate. He will have to sell out. But," after a few moments of satisfied contemplation, "are you dead sure the game is fixed? No chance of a slip-up?"

"Not a chance in the world. We have three of the best players on the team with us—catcher and first and that slugging fielder who does most of their hitting. They'll fix it up all right."

"How about the pitcher?"

"Oh, don't worry about him," Brush laughed deprecatingly. "We didn't have to take a chance with him—he's pretty thick with the greenie—but he's an old has-been; dropped out of the big game because he has a glass arm." Brush chuckled over the merry slaughter he visioned. "When the Windsor batters get at him it will be a circus anyway."

But under a desk in the dark outer office a jaw clamped tight with determination that was not so promising for Windsor hopes. So these crooks had tricked young Emerson into betting beyond his limit, and now they were ready to strip him! Speed Hanley promised himself and the three drawers that lined one side of his refuge that he'd have a decided something to say about that.

For a seeming eternity the two sat talking in the manager's office, but at last Johnson gathered together the papers that had evidently brought them there, the light winked out, and they passed through the outer office and out of the building.

Again Hanley twirled the safe combination and sat down to an hour of patient work—but this firm determination and a hot desire for revenge spurred him on. Hanley detested crooks of every ilk, but especially he

despised and hated the cowardly sure-thing crook who puts his dirty hands onto baseball.

THE local baseball park, hired for the occasion, was packed with rooters as Speed Hanley warmed up before the game. Along one side the Hendon supporters whooped it up for their team. Opposite, the visiting Windsor contingent rallied behind their band and shook the stands with their yelling.

It was an inspiring sight—quite removed, it is true, from the crowded baseball parks of the big leagues, but the sight sent the thrills chasing up and down Hanley's spine. To him this was but a precursor to that day when he would make his big league comeback. As he nodded his head to another word of advice from Emerson, watching the warming up beside him, Hanley swore again that he would win that game—single-handed if necessary.

"Play ball!" called the umpire, and the annual Hendon-Windsor ball game was on.

Only four Windsor batters faced Hanley in that first inning; it should have been only three, for they all went out by the strike-out route, Ryan, the catcher, dropping one third strike and allowing the batter to reach his base.

Again in the second inning Hanley struck out two men and allowed but a single scratch hit. But again the catcher allowed a strike-out to reach first base—and advanced him all the way to third on a passed ball.

Meanwhile the Hendon team had been unable to do a thing with the opposing pitcher. With the score still blank Windsor came up for the third inning. A strike-out solved the first problem, and should have solved the second—but again Ryan allowed the ball to slip through his legs and trail back to the stands.

Hanley's eyes narrowed dangerously as the fans gave loud voice to their disapproval. Once might have been ex-

cusable—but three times! The next Windsor batter dumped a short bunt before the plate. Quickly the catcher swooped down upon the ball, and promptly hurled it into right field, controverting an easy out into a two-base hit and advancing the other runner to third.

Again Hanley's eyes narrowed and his jaws set. As the next man stepped to the plate Ryan signaled for a high curve. From his position behind the plate, Hanley knew that the catcher intended to make this look like a wild pitch, thus forcing in a run.

Without acknowledging the signal, he wound up and shot the ball toward the plate. With all the old speed it traveled, straight as a bullet, squarely at the catcher. Rattled and taken wholly by surprise, Ryan threw up his hands to save himself.

Snap—a finger hung limply from his right hand, and Hanley dashed in from the box in time to recover the ball and hold the runner at third. With the substitute catcher behind the bat the next two Windsor batters were easy outs.

So the game advanced to the sixth inning without either side scoring. Hanley was pitching as he had never pitched before, determining the whole result of the game at the plate. One or two experiments had convinced him that his centerfield was a wide open hole, and that no help could be expected from first base. His only safe course was to keep the ball in one half of the infield and to keep men off the base paths. Eleven strike-outs he had accumulated in the five innings, but apprehensively he began to realize that his arm was tiring. Ryan had done more for his crooked employers than he realized; the fierce pace he had made Hanley adopt was beginning to tell. Four more innings—could he make it?

Through the sixth he allowed no Windsor batter past first. Again through the seventh no Windsor batter got past second, but the arm was

getting heavier with every ball pitched. If only he had the margin of a single run to work on; but the punch in the Hendon batting order was entirely lacking. The two promising rallies had been nipped in the bud—and Hanley well knew the reason for his opponents' apparent effectiveness.

As the pain in his arm increased his thoughts grew bitter; certainly he had done his part—no man could be expected to win the whole game by himself.

He could only do so much. Why should he jeopardize his whole future, take the chance of permanently injuring his arm, for such an insignificant game as this?

But in view of Emerson's anxious, straining face on the sidelines, and a glimpse of the encouraging smile he quickly assumed for his pitcher's benefit, rejuvenated Hanley's determination as he entered the box for the eighth inning.

BUT this inning was a troublesome one from the start, the first batter starting out with a single. Not daring to throw to first, Hanley had to let his man steal second. The second man walked; the ball simply would not go where it should, try as he would to control it. Then, while each motion was a cycle of pain, Hanley clamped his teeth and struck out the next two men and forced the third to foul out to the catcher.

At last, in their half of the eighth inning, the Hendon team converted a double and a single into a run. With this slight margin, and with an arm that seemed weighted at his side, Speed Hanley went out to face the last torturing inning.

The first man to face him singled. The next fortunately popped to right field.

The third man walked, the last ball falling dead several feet before it reached the plate.

The next man bunted—an easy bunt

to the pitcher's box. Hanley fielded the ball, looked toward first, where his man should have been an easy out, but dared not risk the throw. A muffed ball now would lose the game, and that bought first baseman was praying for a chance to muff.

Although the fans scoffed and booed, Hanley turned to face the plate; there alone he knew the issue must be decided. Grimly closing his mind to the racking pains which seemed to be tearing the muscles of his arm to pieces, Hanley gave the batter every bit of speed and baseball cunning he could rally.

Finally, on the fourth pitched ball, the batter hit an easy bounder to third base.

One more man to put out! Hanley's head seemed whirling—he was dizzy and uncertain. Hysterically through his tired brain rushed a host of arguments and counter-arguments. Why should he torture himself further? He was throwing away his future. What business of his was it if Emerson was fool enough to bet his fortune away?

But Emerson was the one man in all that crowded field who had offered an encouraging word when he, Speed Hanley, walked out of baseball. Emerson believed in him, had confidence in him when the others jeered. But he had paid that debt; surely he could not do any more. He simply could not lift that arm again.

But he did.

"Ball one," said the umpire.

And again.

"Ball two," as the ball fell short of the plate.

It was no use; the arm was through. No man could pitch with such an arm.

The stands were in an uproar, Hendon rooters begging for one more out, the Windsor crowd howling hilariously to rattle the pitcher and help their men to the hit that would mean the game.

"Ball three," announced the umpire.

Through the din came a sound which cut its way to Hanley's consciousness,

a shrill, high-pitched voice that broke raspingly. "Oh, you great big four-flush," it screamed. "Oh, you great big bum!"

Hanley would have recognized that voice among thousands, and, although he did not recognize it as that of the frantic Squeak Brush, it stirred him to the core.

Once he had to listen to that abusive voice as he passed out in failure; this time—

"Strike one!" as the ball shot over the plate.

"Strike two!" as the second ball shot over with all the steam the once famous Speed Hanley had ever packed behind a pitch.

Again he wound up, but the arm was numb; he could not even feel the sharp crack which his ears reported. The old speed simply could not be forced up.

The ball floated slowly toward the plate—but the batter, expecting another blind burst of speed, swung wildly at the deceptive floater, and the game was over.

And Fate started to total up the box score.

FIRST to reach Hanley, and to protect him from the rush of triumphant rooters, were Tom Emerson and a middle-aged man of keen and authoritative appearance.

"Mighty good work, George," was all Emerson said as he clasped his hand around Hanley's arm and helped open a way for him through the press of admiring friends.

"You got Johnson?" Hanley questioned anxiously.

"Nailed him with the goods," the older man assured him. "Old Velvet didn't wait to see how the game turned out; he was taking no chances after things started to go wrong. Cleaned out the office safe of everything he could lay hands on and lit out for the station.

"We grabbed him at the ticket window. Your figures were fine—just what old Emerson thought; these crooks had been robbing him all along, faking the books."

A shrill penetrating voice was raised in loud protest at one of the gates.

"That's our friend Squeak," commented the keen-looking man. "He stayed around till the last minute; the boys were waiting for him when he tried to join Johnson."

Then, turning to Tom Emerson, he handed that perplexed gentleman a letter. It was addressed to Robert Hanley of the Mercantile Detective Agency, written in the script of old Lorin Emerson. It explained many things.

"My brother George had been hanging around giving me a hand here and there, and he fitted in finely with your uncle's suggestion that we send a ball player to your plant," the elder Hanley explained. "It gave him a chance to try the comeback he's been aching for—and, besides, he knows the metal ware game from A to Z."

Speed Hanley groaned. "Well, that comeback's done for now," he put in dejectedly. "That arm will never pitch another ball; broke again—lucky if I can even use it. But I simply had to win that game. If I hadn't they would have cleaned you out, made you sell the plant for a song, and then laughed at any crooked work we could charge them with."

To Emerson a new surprise unfolded with each minute, but he at last found his bearings and remembered that he was owner of the Hendon Metalware Company.

"I never heard of a factory manager who had to pitch anything," he said, with a smile that was gratitude and genuine friendship in one. "You've got a whole machine works on your hand now, George—and I think we shall get on without any efficiency expert."



Argonotes

The Readers' Viewpoint



MME. STOREY rang the bell again with this reader:

Carthage, Mo.

Just a few words to express my keen appreciation of your wonderful magazine. It cannot be equalled for the money anywhere. I have read the ARGOSY-ALLSTORY for years and have found but very few stories in its pages I did not like.

Please, Mr. Editor, keep on publishing this good magazine just as it is. To change it would, in my opinion, lower its high quality.

Have just finished "The Black Ace," and I'll say it is the best Mme. Storey story I have ever had the pleasure of reading. Also "The Phantom in the Rainbow." It was excellent. Would like another story similar to "A Brand New World."

MRS. W. O. LEFFERT.

AND with this one also:

San Antonio, Texas,
Route G, Box 76.

I have just started "The Way of the West" and "The Cardinal's Curse." They both started out good, and when a story starts out good it's bound to end up good.

I just finished "The Black Ace." It was a dandy story.

I would like to correspond with the younger ARGOSY bookworms, from the ages of ten to thirty, as I'm fourteen years old.

KATHLEEN CALL.

AN old-time Westerner steps up to tell us how he met ARGOSY and how he likes it since then:

Manderson, Wyo.

I began reading the ARGOSY in 1904, and am sure it was a lucky day for me when I connected with the first number of it.

I am a blacksmith and had been working quite awhile—four years—in Casper, Wyo., when that was the end of the railroad, but on learning that said road was going to build on to Lander I moved out ahead of the work and set up a shop at old Wolton—now no longer on the map.

One evening I strolled into the old log saloon and, after duly conforming to the rules and manners expected of a white man at that time, I expressed a wish for something to read. Old Bill Fry, the bartender, tossed an ARGOSY over to me, saying, "Here, blacksmith, try that and see what you think of it." And I know there was sure one bartender who was a gentleman, a scholar, and a judge of good

reading as well as whisky. I have been a faithful friend and booster for ARGOSY ever since.

I take great interest in Argonotes, and have often wanted to speak out in meetin' and let a voice from Wyoming be heard.

I am plumb satisfied with ARGOSY. Don't have to force myself to read any of it, but would like just one Western story that would give a true picture of the West—Colorado, Wyoming and Montana, as I have known it from 1890 to the present time. I sure wish some good writer could get hold of true facts and happenings around Casper, Wolton, Lost Cabin, Cheverville, Hole in Wall country, the old Jack Pot ranch, E. K. Cañon, Spring Creek and a lot more of those old places. He could weave them into an honest-to-goodness story that would sure sound good.

I and my old pard came north from Mecker, Colo., in 1895, before I turned blacksmith, with saddle and pack outfit, fell in with a cow outfit buying up stock in the Sweetwater country to drive north to Montana. Said outfit being short-handed, we helped them through with their herd as far as Sheridan, right through the country chosen as the scene of your Western yarn, "The Way of the West." I quit the bunch at Sheridan and stuck around on that range for nine years.

It strikes me that there is a mighty small per cent of ARGOSY readers who are in the kicker class. Well, just let 'em kick; got to have a little of that to make things natural. Can't find a good saw log without a few knots in it, you know. As for me, I just say, "Hurrah for ARGOSY; let 'er ride."

O. E. HOBACK.

SOME time ago Mr. A. L. Glasser made some remarks in Argonotes about the moronic readers who jump on any one who criticizes ARGOSY. Among those who promptly jumped on him was the following:

Albany, Ore.

If any one is a moron, it is Mr. A. L. Glasser. Every one is free to criticize—and it is well.

Is it stupid to criticize? Then I am afraid he is dyed with the same brush. Would you call scientification fantasy? I should say not. If the man would remember "what is fiction to-day may be fact to-morrow" he would receive an eye-opener.

Who said it was a sacrilege to criticize this magazine? He brought that up himself.

He must never have been a debater. One should have proof when one attacks an argument.

We are fortunate to have such an excellent magazine for a dime. Put the price to a quarter—and hear the penny-snatchers howl. I can stand the price.

Would a moron read scientification? Would he approve of it as Mr. Heiss does? I guess not. Haven't we a right to shoot back at the criticizers? Every man for himself.

I must say you have a grand and glorious magazine. Would like to see more war stories, especially about aces. Build up a white and gleaming monument in the memories of the survivors and descendants of the boys who went over there.

When I first found your magazine I had a thin dime in my pocket and wanted something good to read—now I purchase your magazine each week and can hardly wait till the next issue comes.

Mr. LaMaster did himself proud when he wrote "The Phantom in the Rainbow," "Ho for London Town," and "The Spectral Passenger" sure were good.

I can see that Lieutenant Hopper's "The Blood of Morgan" is going to be good—more power to him. Can hardly wait for *Semi Dual* to come again. He was the other reason I purchased ARGOSY. L. P. MILLER.

THIS is a method we certainly can recommend for making new fans for ARGOSY:

Hanford, Calif.

It's pretty hard to say which stories I like best as I read the magazine from end to end. Some, of course, I like better than others, but as I've been a fan for twelve years, you see, there are very few I don't enjoy. I started reading when I had two small babies, and the *All-Story* at that time was my only fun; now those two small babies are fans, like myself. We all have a time when the new copy comes home.

Thanks for many hours of enjoyment.

MRS. D. W. KINNISON.

AN old-timer from North Dakota recalls some of the best tales of the old days:

Williston, N. Dak.

Thank you seven million times for the fine magazines you are putting out.

Bueno! They make me as happy as a Missouri nightingale—mule—at supper time. Have passed many a pleasant hour with the good old ARGOSY.

Still remember such smashing good tales as: "Once Aboard a Whaler," "The Untamed," "The Silver Cipher," "From Now On," "Koyola, the Beautiful," "Above the Law," and sundry others.

Among your present crop of writers, MacIsaac, Worts, and McMorrow are your eagles that fly a little higher than the rest; that is, of course, in my estimation.

CLYDE AKIN.

AND here are a few favorites of more recent vintage:

Tampa, Fla.

I have been reading the ARGOSY-ALLSTORY for some years now and I think that it is so good that I'll write in and give my opinion of it.

If the ARGOSY was to be discontinued I don't know what I would do, as I get more pleasure from it than any other magazine I've ever read.

How about some more stories like "On to Florida," "Sheik of Florida," and "Seven Footprints to Satan"? They were some good tales.

Let me hear more from George Worts and Fred MacIsaac. HARRY E. ROSE.

"HE RULES WHO CAN" made this convert to ARGOSY. Incidentally, Arthur Gilchrist Brodeur will be back with a fine historical novelette in the issue of June 15.

Comanche, Texas.

I have read your magazine for a number of years, but only recently started reading it regularly. "He Rules Who Can" started me, but of all the stories I have ever read in your magazine I like "The Phantom in the Rainbow" best. Here's hoping you print another one similar soon.

SHAD S. PHILLIPS.

YOUR CHOICE COUPON

Editor, ARGOSY-ALLSTORY WEEKLY,
280 Broadway, N. Y. C., N. Y.

The stories I like best in this issue of the magazine are as follows:

1.....

2.....

3.....

4.....

5.....

I did not like.....

because.....

Name.....

Street.....

City.....State.....



Looking Ahead!

MAY 18th

MAY 18th

NEXT WEEK BRINGS

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with his latest novel of the underworld

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After an absence of five years Mr. Packard celebrates his return to the pages of ARGOSY with one of the outstanding stories of his long list of popular successes. "The Big Shot" is laid in the underworld of New York; most of its stirring scenes occurring during the hours when honest men sleep and gangsters prowl. This setting is home to the Big Shot, gang leader and master crook—but the last place one would expect to find young Enid Howard, fresh from a small town home. Clean, upright and fine—yet courageous and determined, she sticks to her heartbreaking task even when success can mean for her only sorrow and dismal failure. A story of human hearts such as could only be told by

FRANK L. PACKARD

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will be present in the same issue with

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